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MORALS IN REVIEW

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MORALS IN REVIEW

BY

A. K. ROGERS

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PREFACE

THE present volume was conceived originally as a more pretentious undertaking than circumstances have permitted me to carry out; but I have come to see that on the scale I had in mind it would not have been completed even under more favorable conditions. A fully competent history of ethics would need to take account of so many sorts of fact that it will be no matter for surprise if it is never written. In the first place it ought to show what human conduct is concretely, and how it has come about. This is a science by itself; and when one has accounted for the appearance in man of those biological traits that render him a human and potentially a moral being, has shown the rise of primitive folkways and of the sentiments and opinions that attend them, has followed their ever-accumulating complexity down to the customs and institutions of the present day, and has traced the peculiarities of their content, and the modifications they have undergone, to their source in a physical or economic or social background, he has to all intents covered the field of human history on its less spectacular side.

Even then a second and almost equally extensive task awaits him; along with the history of customs or manners there would need to go a history of ideals. It might be urged that this, too, belongs to "science," and that ideals are themselves nothing but expressions of natural forces. But for all practical purposes there is presented here a separate problem that needs a special treatment of its own. Along with the impersonal customs that arise in a group of men collectively under common external conditions, there are other aspects of man's conscious life which quite definitely

seem traceable to more individual sources. To be sure, these temperamental influences do not work in a vacuum; circumstances will help determine which of the many possible interests that lie potentially in human nature are to get the upper hand, and what direction in particular they are to take. But also experience makes evident that the result will in part depend on the character of the man himself. And while it is presumably the case that individual human qualities have some natural cause, no cautious scientist will pretend that he can trace their origin in more than the vaguest and most conjectural of outlines, still less that this origin can be shown to be accounted for by the mere influence of the seasons or of market conditions. The plain truth is that any significant dealing with the life of man is compelled to take for granted the empirical variety of man's nature, if it is to get beyond a few trite generalizations and come within hailing distance of the concrete realities of the cultural history of the race. And for anyone who is not obsessed by a dogma it is a distinctive intellectual or emotional variation in some individual that marks the beginning of nearly every important movement of ideas, or freshly discovered way of life.

In proportion as a new ideal comes to dominate other men, such a distinctive insight will no doubt tend to pass into an orthodoxy which, while holding fast a form of words and a profession of idealistic faith, in actual fact has approached again that commonplace level of average human living where the economic motives largely have their way. But this only calls attention to limitations in the power of personal ideals, and does not show their non-existence. The historian who should point to the life of the average church member, and the proceedings of the average ecclesiastical conference, to prove that Christianity is a phenomenon independent of any peculiar contribution from its founders, would be at least as wide of the truth as the traditionalist who interprets the Church only in the light of its primitive

enthusiasms. Strange as it may seem to the casual observer of mankind, even reason and logic sometimes play a part in giving direction to the shaping of convictions that goes on under the influence of natural desires and needs; and logic is at any rate an individual rather than a social product.

And now to the historical survey of customs and ideals there remains to be added the final and technical content of a history of ethics—the work of the philosopher in endeavoring to get a speculative understanding of the terms which the ethical experience has been employing, to systematize them, and bring them into consistency with one another and with the facts. This is a less exciting task and one that makes a far less general appeal. Of course as a matter of fact it cannot be kept separate in any strict way from the former inquiries. An accurate description of the meaning of the moral concepts is hopeless except as the philosopher keeps dipping back into the stream of ethical experience, racial as well as individual. In the same way there is no sharp line between philosophy and the creation of working ideals, since in this last enterprise philosophers have themselves taken a reasonably important part. The greater names in the history of ethics are mostly those of men who have been disposed to a particular way of life based on some personal sense of value, which they have felt to be good before they set out to prove it so. Even thus, however, the philosopher is still marked off from the reformer or the moral seer through his primary interest in giving to his ideal a rational justification; and this intellectual interest lends itself to a relatively separate treatment.

It is to the third and more conventional meaning of ethics that the present volume will confine itself—to the intellectual clarification of the ethical experience by the thinker. In fact my interest is a still more limited one, so that I have hesitated to describe the book as a "history of ethics" even in the technical sense, and have preferred a less exigent title. What I have set out to do is, not to

reproduce everything that philosophers have said about ethics, but to isolate the more significant contributions which have left a definite mark, especially as these are still relevant to discussions at the present day. Consequently I have felt justified in passing over names of which a history of ethics might be expected to take some notice. Many reputable philosophers have written about ethics who obviously have had nothing in particular to say, or whose contributions are confined to minor details; and even where a measure of novelty is present it sometimes happens that the reverberations in popular thought have been so out of proportion to the weight of intellectual justification which the ethicist supplies that there has seemed no special reason for inclusion here. It is a waste of time, for instance, to debate seriously at the present day the ethical doctrines of Helvetius. The pleasures of the senses may need to be defended against hypocrisy or prudishness; and even the thesis that they constitute the only source of human good and human duty has a considerable historical importance in connection with its naturalistic background, especially as incident to an attack on priestcraft. But Helvetius' notions of what constitutes the proof of a general proposition are so naïve, and his argument alike for pleasure as the individual good, and for the general welfare as the political or social good, proceeds in so happy-go-lucky a fashion, as to have practically no value for the systematic thinker. It is improbable that my selective judgment has been always sound. I may here and there have attributed to a philosopher a significance which he does not intrinsically possess, and have omitted names of more importance. But in the absence of any pretense to completeness this may be found, I hope, excusable.

And such an excuse I have the less hesitation in offering because of a further consideration. Presumably I am not the only student of philosophy who has found the history of ethics an exceptionally difficult field from which to carry

away clear-cut conclusions alike as to the content and the development of doctrines. Details here have a peculiar tendency to obscure essential principles; matters of theory and of practice elbow one another with no clear line of demarcation; successive thinkers have too often an appearance of oscillating between alternative preferences rather than of taking part in a progressive discovery of truth; and altogether there is an absence of that clear intellectual perspective which the philosopher desiderates. I make no claim to having done much to reduce a confusion which to an extent is really inherent in the subject matter; but I have at least aimed by the method of exclusion to render the threads of order less invisible. Chiefly this has been done by ignoring minor details as much as possible, and concentrating on what, rightly or wrongly, I have taken to be essentials; but the motive has frequently led me also, when in doubt, to decide against possible candidates.

It is perhaps worth pointing out again, by way of warning, one hindrance in particular to a logically straightforward exposition which is insurmountable—the fact, already adverted to, that there are two relatively separate speculative quests which run through the history of ethics, and which seldom will completely dovetail. The one that most readily lends itself to something like an orderly development is in terms of an analysis of concepts. It would seem as if in this field verifiable results might well be reached to furnish a point of departure for succeeding efforts; and it is mainly here that such measure of continuity will be found as is discoverable in the history of ethical opinion.

Even this sort of continuity, however, is not so great as might have been expected; and one reason lies in the disturbing influence of the second main intellectual interest that has engaged the ethicist. Often, that is, he has been less intent on an impartial logical or psychological analysis than on trying to deduce a particular interpretation of the ethical experience from fundamental premises, and along the

lines of the instinctive preference which determines his—the philosopher's—own conception of the good. A large share of speculative ethics will thus be found to be concerned with the personal contribution of this or that philosopher to the history of ideals—a contribution which the philosopher does not himself, of course, regard as personal, but which instead he universalizes by bringing it within a metaphysical system, explicit or implied. It is probable most readers will find this not the least interesting part of a technical account of ethics. But it evidently will not lend itself so readily to a well-defined evolutionary program, at least until we are able to predict more accurately than at present the order in which personal temperaments among great thinkers will make their appearance on the stage of history.

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MORALS IN REVIEW

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CHAPTER I

GREEK ETHICS

Socrates

1. The beginnings of ethics as a branch of human science it has been customary to trace to Socrates; and while any point of departure is bound to be arbitrary to some extent, since written history does not record a time when men showed no tendency whatever to reflect on the problems of conduct, there are sufficiently good reasons for the usual procedure. It is true, at least, that it was Socrates who inspired the first efforts to think systematically about the moral life in a form that had a permanent and pervading influence upon subsequent European speculation.

Unfortunately, however, when we come to settle accounts with the available evidence, the features of the historical Socrates, and the character of the services which he performed to ethical thought, are left exceedingly uncertain and obscure. There is an abundance of testimony, such as it is; only the testimony does not hang together. Our two main authorities are Xenophon and Plato; and a colorless description may indeed be framed on which the two agree. It is safe to take for granted that Socrates was a man who exerted a large influence upon the life of his day through notable personal qualities; that he was conspicuously self-controlled in character and fearless in his speech and conduct; that he devoted himself not to politics but to private conversation and debate, in which he showed a keen and powerful mind, and a moral insight, that attracted the younger men in particular; and that it was problems of

conduct that interested him rather than the scientific speculations that hitherto had chiefly engaged Greek thinkers. But when any attempt is made to clothe with flesh and blood these general statements, it becomes at once apparent that, as concrete personalities, the Socrates of Plato and the Socrates of Xenophon are very far apart. Most readers have, or think they have, a fairly clear and consistent picture of the man. But the picture comes from Plato, whose gifts as an artist have fixed what probably will always be in the popular mind the Socratic type; and if Plato has created what to any appreciable extent is a fancy portrait, a question at once arises about our right to accept any features of this portrait in particular. Accordingly it becomes quite necessary to start with an attempt to evaluate the main sources from which our knowledge of Socrates is derived.

No one would be inclined to dispute that, of the two, Plato is the more capable witness, if only we can rely on his good faith. He was better acquainted with Socrates personally and with Socrates' most intimate friends; and he was far and away the more competent philosophical mind. Nevertheless it has been Xenophon's testimony that the majority of modern scholars have preferred. Few of them have been thoroughgoing in this preference; they have borrowed traits from Plato whenever it has suited their convenience, without any too great a regard for consistency at times. But so far, at any rate, as Socrates' peculiar contribution to ethics is concerned—if in this form it can still be called a contribution—Xenophon rather than Plato has been taken as the more reliable witness.

One reason for this preference is the fact that Plato is felt to be quite capable of creating the character of Socrates out of whole cloth; and if we do thus take the Platonic Socrates as a figure so highly idealized as to become to all intents and purposes a character of fiction, the discrepancies will have found a simple solution. It is the easier to sup-

pose this in that everybody admits that Plato's dialogues cannot by any chance be regarded as literal reports, but are, to some extent at least, artistic constructions; and in the later dialogues, at any rate, he unquestionably does attribute things to Socrates that are difficult to regard as historical. And along with this goes the less legitimate reason that critics have plainly often been overimpressed by the matter-of-factness of Xenophon's account, and have assumed too readily that, as between commonplaceness and artistic distinction, the former is likely to be closer to the facts.

There seems, however, no apparent reason why a spirit of caution should be abandoned when we pass from Plato to Xenophon. If Plato is an artist, Xenophon is confessedly an apologist. It is not historical truth at which he is aiming first of all. He is an advocate, concerned to clear the name of Socrates of the charge of being an irreligious and immoral influence in the state; and with a pious purpose such as this a writer not only is not bound to be overscrupulous about strict accuracy, but he is really under obligations to censor his material. As a matter of fact it is difficult to see how anyone is to escape the conclusion that Xenophon, no more than Plato, can be trusted for bringing us into contact with the actual words that Socrates uttered. That he had reminiscences to draw upon is probable. But that he should have been able to report with anything like literalness the many long speeches which he retails is in the nature of things altogether unlikely, especially when we remember that it was a recognized convention for historical writers to put speeches into the mouths of their characters.

It is worth noting that there are two methods which Xenophon adopts. On the one hand there are brief sayings of Socrates, brief historical anecdotes, and brief statements by Xenophon himself that Socrates held such and such views. Here on the whole there is no sufficient ground for denying that Xenophon often had, or supposed he had, something like distinct recollections to go upon, especially

since some of these more casual utterances have a pith and pungency that seem to bring us into contact with a real personage.

But along with these there are also numerous more elaborate conversations which every reasonable consideration goes to show were framed by Xenophon himself to illustrate or enforce the conception of Socrates and his teaching which he believed himself justified in holding. Not only are these conversations too long and detailed to be vouched for by memory, but they are almost invariably lacking in intellectual distinction; the reasoning is confused and sometimes puerile, and the conclusions for the most part painfully commonplace. It is possible in some cases that the conversation is based on fact. It may very well, for example, have been within Xenophon's knowledge that Socrates had composed a quarrel between two brothers; and the advice to Aristarchus, in particular, has a convincing ring. But that the actual words attributed to Socrates are anywhere more than a natural attempt to dramatize the incident to which they are attached is inherently unlikely. And in other cases this embroidering of the meager details of Xenophon's knowledge probably extends to the entire setting; at times he almost says as much, when he passes from brief and summary statements to inferences which they suggest or to their concrete illustration.[1] That the name of Euthydemus, in particular, represents a literary device rather than a source of genuine reminiscences, seems almost certain. This is plainly evident in the chapter where Socrates, in a most un-Socratic way, defines for his benefit a list of ethical terms; [2] and the manner in which the conversations with him—the longest taking place with no witnesses present—form a crude sort of plot, wherein the young man's aloofness and self-conceit are converted into a spirit of humble discipleship suited to the further recep-

[1] *Cf. Memorabilia* III. 8. 8.
[2] IV. 6.

tion of Socratic teachings, is much more suggestive of fiction than of fact.

While it is not necessary to suppose, then, that Xenophon's account of Socrates is intentionally misleading, or that he has no first-hand knowledge on which to base his *apologia,* the habit of quoting uncritically as evidence any statement that he happens to ascribe to Socrates is a most unfortunate one; and we cannot safely use him as a standard by which to condemn Plato whenever Plato's testimony disagrees. On the whole, the testimony of a close and competent disciple has naturally the right of way. Even the argument in terms of Plato's artistic interest is far from unambiguous. The more we grant that Plato was artist enough to have created, had he chosen, a new and fictitious character under the historic name of Socrates, the less probable does it become that he would actually have done this; from a true artist in Plato's day it is a more realistic treatment we should naturally have looked for, and not one that has transformed its original almost beyond recognition. And in this connection there is another interesting fact that deserves attention. There is in existence a third and independent portrait of Socrates in his earlier days—that drawn by Aristophanes in the *Clouds.* This third portrait, while it has significant points of contact with that of Plato, is totally irreconcilable with the Socrates of Xenophon. And if, accordingly, we insist on taking the latter as a standard, we must suppose that Aristophanes also, wishing to present a notable Athenian character on the stage, first altered the character so completely that little but the name was left to identify it to his audience. That two such consummate artists as Aristophanes and Plato should have adopted so unusual a method in dealing with the same contemporary is to strain the probabilities too far.

2. In turning now to a closer consideration of the facts at our disposal, we are fortunately in a position to be

reasonably confident of a starting-point. There is a consensus of evidence that Socrates' teaching was summed up in the fundamental proposition that *virtue is knowledge,* along with the related claim that the virtues are all in essence one, and that no man does wrong voluntarily, but only through ignorance. Just what interpretation these general statements are to bear, however, is another and more difficult matter. And any interpretation must be an arbitrary one until some background is provided in the shape of an estimate of Socrates' intellectual characteristics and interests.

There are certain features in the intellectual portrait of Socrates which as a matter of fact nearly everyone accepts as historical; though it is sometimes forgotten how almost exclusively it is to Plato, rather than to Xenophon, that the picture is due. On the very lowest terms, this Platonic Socrates stands out as a man in whom, against a background of strong moral convictions, there plays a quick, ironical, penetrating, skeptical intellect, always on the alert for absurdities, and ready to track them down wherever they may lead; and a man who, moreover, directs this same irony against himself as well, and, far from professing to be a source of wisdom, neglects no opportunity of insisting that he knows nothing whatever except his own lack of knowledge, and that his office is simply that of midwife in assisting at the birth of thoughts in other men.

If we take seriously the outstanding features here—and they appear not only in the discussions in which Socrates is depicted as engaging, but in the outright statements where there is most reason to suppose that Plato intends, if anywhere, to tell the truth—we are led to certain conclusions that are not always kept sufficiently in mind. In this light, Socrates reveals himself, not as first of all an ethical theorist aiming at a scientific definition of moral concepts, but as a reformer of a peculiar sort. We are overlooking the essential point in Plato if we fail to keep

well in the foreground the explicit assertion that, following the incident of the oracle at Delphi, Socrates conceived of his life as devoted to a special task in the service of the God and of the state. This service was to awaken the citizens of Athens to the need of a serious examination of the ends and ideals they supposed themselves to be accepting, by convincing them that they were by no means the wise and superior persons they were accustomed to assume, and by securing thus a sound starting-point for the growth of true wisdom. This particular moral purpose Socrates declares solemnly before his judges is the key for understanding his life.

There is perhaps no better way of conveying the point here than by an expressive modern phrase. Socrates was the first great expert in "debunking." [3] It was the absurdity of human pretensions that chiefly caught his eye in every class of society about him; and he made it his life-work to puncture these pretensions and to force men to the uncongenial task of an honest self-analysis. It is to this that Plato makes Socrates himself ascribe the hostility that issued in his condemnation—a statement which, following the decision of the judges, can hardly be suspected of any levity or tendency to quibbling such as might perhaps be thought discoverable in the earlier part of his defense. It is no doubt true that more than personal pique lay behind the action of the judges; in particular, there was the feeling that Socrates was somehow really dangerous to the Athenian democracy. But there is no real contradiction here. We have no need to look beyond the present day to realize that for anyone to turn the skeptical intelligence upon the solid conventional reputations and estimates of worth that impress the average man, and to encourage any tendency to think freely and for oneself, is to lay the ground for just the charges that assailed Socrates; one is an enemy of sound morality and of the Constitution, a danger to the

[3] *Cf.* Alcibiades' remark, *Symposium* 216, E.

immaturity of youth, and doubtless an atheist at heart. This spirit of ridicule directed against pretenses and unrealities constitutes a familiar human type. Socrates differs from the ordinary satirist only in having a more intense personal background of moral conviction. In attacking human futilities it was not their intellectual absurdity alone that influenced him, but their inadequacy to his own strong sense of values; he was not only a satirist, that is, but a reformer. But he was a reformer, once more, who had no panacea of his own except the panacea of clear thinking; Socrates' professions of ignorance are an essential part of the picture and such professions continue to the very end of his life.

It will not be disputed that what has just been pointed out enters into the account that Plato gives of Socrates; and so far it hangs together. Before trying to add to it, however, it will be desirable to turn back again to Xenophon. And if we were not in a position to bring this view of Socrates with us to Xenophon's pages, it is quite clear we never should have supposed ourselves to find it there. Xenophon's Socrates is a man with much moral earnestness, indeed; but he has an almost stodgy mind, for the most part without salt or humor. The tone of ironic self-depreciation is conspicuous by its absence. Verbally, Xenophon admits that Socrates did not set up as a teacher of virtue directly. But in point of fact he appears continually as a preacher and exhorter, who sermonizes even in his attempts at dialectic. Worst of all, he is a good deal of a prig, and his whole life is represented as an earnest attempt to transfer to his associates the seeds of moral excellence of which he is conscious in himself. The difference in the two accounts is shown instructively in the two versions of the famous reply of the oracle. In Plato, the reply to Chærophon's question calls Socrates the wisest of men; and the narrative goes on to tell of Socrates' modest perplexity over this, and of how finally he found a clue to

the God's meaning by deciding that it was only in the consciousness of his own ignorance that he excelled other men. But in Xenophon's obviously secondary account,[4] Socrates is made preëminent in righteousness as well as in wisdom—probably Xenophon argues that this follows if knowledge and virtue are the same—and Socrates accepts the answer placidly as his due, and uses it to confound his judges. As a matter of fact, the Socratic ignorance has no place in Xenophon. There is extremely scant evidence of the skeptical caution which according to Plato characterized his intellect; Socrates has perfectly definite ideas about virtue and the good, ideas that in the main coincide with traditional morality and popular opinion. So, too, while Xenophon seems to be aware of the real nature of the Socratic method as it appears in Plato, he himself follows it only at a remote distance. The conversations are for the most part only in appearance heuristic. Socrates' intentions are throughout obtrusively didactic. He starts with ready-made conclusions in his mind to which he is all the time obviously leading up; it is only formally that his hearers do any thinking of their own, since thought is not necessary to answer "yes" or "no" to leading questions; and, in general, the show of logical rigor fails entirely to cover Socrates' own poverty of thought.

It is difficult to see, then, up to this point, the slightest reason for preferring Xenophon to Plato; while at least one good reason points strongly to the opposite conclusion. Apart from the superior impression of reality which Plato's picture makes, it is necessary to account for the historically well-established fact of the powerful influence which Socrates exerted over the young men of Athens, an influence continuing throughout a long lifetime, and affecting men of such very different types as Plato, Aristippus, Alcibiades, Euclid, Antisthenes. This influence is a mystery on the supposition that Socrates was the sort of person

[4] *Apology*.

that Xenophon describes. And such a conclusion becomes still more insistent when consideration is given to a further aspect in which the two portraits differ.

3. A brief characterization of Socrates' temperament as Xenophon conceives him is attained with a fair degree of adequacy by classifying him as an empiricist in method, a utilitarian in theory, and, in general, a devotee of what is ordinarily called common sense. And it is perfectly true that there are elements not obviously inconsistent with this that find a place in the dialogues of Plato. But especially in a group of dialogues from which comes a peculiarly vivid impression of Socrates as a human being—in particular, the *Phædo* and *Symposium*—the distinctive feature of his natural temper of mind stands out in an entirely different light. Here he shows himself, rather, in the essential character of the mystic. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the measure in which this mystical note dominates the picture which such dialogues present. It is not as a plodding empiricist that Socrates now appears, collecting instances and drawing inductive definitions from them, but as a passionate enthusiast for an ideal righteousness and truth and beauty as they exist unchanging in a changeless world. Of such eternal verities this actual world contains only faint and imperfect copies; and our knowledge of them comes, accordingly, not from sense particulars, which only help suggest them, but from a vision of the realities themselves which we have had in a former and better existence unincumbered by the body. To reattain this vision is the end of all philosophy. For philosophy is the one method of satisfying fully that love for the beautiful and the good which is the central urge of human nature, and the guiding motive of all genuine wisdom and attainment; and it is only the mystic who is the true philosopher.[5] Are we to regard this as simply a literary

[5] *Phædo* 69.

expression of a phase of Plato's own earlier development, or is it to be taken as a true portrait?

It is worth while to return here for a moment to the question of inherent probability. It does not seem likely that most of those who take the traditional view have ever stopped to realize clearly what they are attributing to Plato. If anything is certain, it is that Plato genuinely revered his master, and believed himself to have received from him the impetus to the philosophic life. But is it credible that a disciple should have chosen to present to the world a figure purporting to be that of Socrates, when he himself knew, and his readers knew, that this was very largely a mask covering his own features? It is understandable that he might have attributed opinions here and there to Socrates that went somewhat beyond his actual teachings, within certain limits presently to be noted. But that he should have made these quite inconsistent with what he was aware Socrates had really taught, and should even have chosen the sacred moments that preceded his master's martyrdom for exploiting his own contrary views, is very difficult to believe. And it becomes particularly improbable when we realize that it involves altering, not Socrates' theoretical opinions merely, but his whole concrete character as well. Surely this is the only instance on record where a pupil has conceived that he is doing honor to a beloved teacher by deliberately representing him to the world as almost the opposite sort of man from what he really was. If Socrates was not a mystic, this is what Plato has done. And if he was a mystic, it is totally impossible to accept Xenophon's portrait. On the other hand, there is no great trouble in accounting for the absence of this trait in Xenophon, since Xenophon is the type of man who could not possibly have understood the mystic temperament.

And to this it is relevant to add a point already noticed

—that the procedure attributed to Plato is bad art as well. In the *Symposium,* for example, there is a remarkable portrait of the man Socrates, with his unique mixture of homely realism and mystical enthusiasm; and the *Symposium* is commonly regarded as ranking among the very best of Plato's dialogues as a work of art. Now it will hardly be suggested that the other characters of the dialogue are not intended to hit off their prototypes. And on the traditional view, accordingly, we are forced to believe that in the midst of his artistic realism, Plato intentionally introduces a discordant note by making his central figure talk in a way entirely out of character. His artistic conscience must have forbidden this had there been no other reason against it.

And there are a number of more or less well-established facts that corroborate this reasoning. For one thing, the unquestioned fact of Socrates' historical influence, which Xenophon fails wholly to explain, is no longer a mystery, even apart from any further and more strictly philosophical traits that may be added to the picture. The multiform nature of this influence points unmistakably to a unique personality, with something more to recommend it to the most brilliant representatives of one of the most brilliant of historic epochs than an impressive moral character and a stout defense of customary morality against his fellow empiricists the Sophists. It is adequately accounted for by that rare combination, which Plato shows us, of logical acuteness and a detached intellect with a wide human interest and sympathy; of an effortless superiority to all the sensual passions with a freedom from ascetic harshness or moral snobbery; and, in particular, of a clear-eyed and ironic appraisal of human life and human nature, and a chronic incapacity for its common idealistic glorification,[6] with an unclouded conviction of the reality of those standards of which actual life falls short, and a mystical enthusi-

[6] *Symposium* 198

asm for their eternal beauty and perfection. And the point of this is particularly apparent in connection with Plato himself. Between the empiricist and utilitarian, and the rationalist and idealist, there has always been a spiritual incompatibility which nothing seems to bridge. And on the usual showing, consequently, we should have to explain the curious fact that the influence of one of the first of the empiricists shows itself, not among the empiricists themselves, but in connection with a man of an entirely different temperament, who is constantly showing his dislike for doctrines with which the teacher he continues to revere is supposed to have been identified.

And there is other and more detailed evidence to aid in judging the probabilities here. We know that Plato as an artist was fully capable of entering into very diverse types of mind, and among them the mystical type. But we also know pretty clearly the sort of mind that Plato himself possessed, since we have a large group of later dialogues in which artistic creation has given place to a primary interest in philosophic speculation. And the more these dialogues are examined, the more evident it seems that Plato was himself not in any proper sense a mystic, but a rationalist of a pronounced type. Of course it is possible to suppose that, when he passes from the *Symposium* and the *Phædo* to his later writings, he is holding his deeper beliefs in abeyance; or that mysticism represents an earlier phase which later he outgrew. But either supposition will present serious difficulties to one who has followed in any detail the workings of Plato's mind in the dialogues that are most unquestionably self-revealing, as well as in the evidence supplied by the reports of his disciple Aristotle, and by the history of the earlier Academy. It is far easier to believe that in the portrait of Socrates Plato is really doing what he seems to be doing—depicting the mind of another and historical person, which in essential ways is different from his own.

With Socrates, on the contrary, we have strong reason to accept as true the attribution of a natural leaning toward mysticism. His trances, the divine voice on which he placed implicit reliance, and to which no purely matter-of-fact explanation does anything like justice, his pious regard for the revelation of the God in dreams and oracles, all point to a temperament far removed from that of his eminent disciple. So, too, the interest he is represented as taking in the not altogether reputable Orphic mysteries goes a good deal more naturally with Socrates' character than it does with that of the fastidious and aristocratic Plato, who, indeed, elsewhere expresses an opinion of them by no means flattering. And also we have independent testimony here that is almost conclusive; for some of Aristophanes' best jokes would have been absolutely without point if Socrates' connection with the mysteries had not been notorious in Athens.

4. Before considering, however, the bearing which this will have on the interpretation of Socrates' ethical teaching, it will first be necessary to turn to another matter of fundamental importance. For we are now in a position to say something about the much disputed question of the relation of Socrates to the "theory of Ideas." In attributing to him the mystical vision of an absolute beauty and goodness, we are already in contact with the essence of the Ideal theory as it appears in the earlier dialogues. There is very slight plausibility to the view that a belief in Ideas originated in the first instance in a process of objectifying what started out as mere conceptual definitions. It is only by a misconception, to begin with, that Socrates' "method" can be said to be inductive in the modern sense; and there is a shorter and much more direct way in which a belief in Ideas can be accounted for. In the presence of any universally valid truth or notion in which it has a tendency to believe, especially if this possesses an emotional appeal as well, realism is the normal attitude of the human mind.

Accordingly Plato always assumes quite as a matter of course that every man of real intelligence must needs recognize that equality and beauty and justice are objective realities, infinitely more real than the fleeting particulars in which they find expression. Nothing, so Simmias is made to say, is more certain than that the beautiful and the good have a most real existence; the theory that the "form" is simply a formula created by the human mind Plato barely mentions, only to dismiss it casually with an argument in which the self-evidence of the contrary view reappears as a basic assumption.

There are two cases in particular where this assumption is especially natural and easy. These are the concepts of mathematics on the one hand, and of ethics on the other; and it is just here that the earlier emphasis of the Ideal theory is placed. Even the thoroughgoing empiricist finds it difficult to convince himself that the truths of arithmetic and geometry are nothing more than subjective points of view; and the testimony of Aristophanes as well as that of Plato goes to show that sometime in his career Socrates had been influenced by the number philosophy of the Pythagoreans. In the field of ethics the reasons, for the ordinary man, are still more compelling. Nn one with intense moral convictions can without a wrenching of his natural bias look upon moral concepts in any other than a realistic and objective way. Justice stands naturally to him not as a generalized notion merely, gathered from acts of a particular empirical sort; it is an eternal and absolute value, which is only partially exhausted in the multitude of actual deeds of justice with which experience is familiar, and which is adequately realized not even in the most perfect of them. And therewith the search for a true definition comes almost inevitably to be, for the realistic mind, the search for a perfect justice, suggested in particular acts but not contained in them; and it is thence only a step to the speculative conclusion that pure

justice has some sort of absolute existence—or our ethical values are jeopardized—in a world that cannot be identified with the shifting world of everyday experience.

It may reasonably be assumed, then, that the starting-point of what issued in the historic theory of Ideas is to be looked for, not in any process of promoting human concepts or definitions to a higher realm—concepts as such carry no emotional appeal to explain the Socratic fervor—but in an immediate feeling for the significance and validity of norms or standards—on the one hand the intellectual standards that govern rigorous and scientific thinking, and on the other standards of objective value. On the former alternative, it would be hard to understand why Plato, in the *Parmenides,* makes the youthful Socrates express hesitation about admitting the reality of such Ideas as that of man, though he is perfectly assured of the reality of goodness; for as a concept nothing could be more typical than "man." But the attitude attributed to Socrates is easy to explain if one has started with the universality of value standards, and then finds himself logically driven to raise a question about the status of other universals as well. In this way we understand, too, how the ideal realm comes to be characterized almost indiscriminately as one of truth, of goodness, and of beauty. Intellectual and moral values, the two main sides of Socrates' interest, it is nearly always impossible for the real enthusiast to disentangle; while both alike, just because they are values, have to contemplation a further emotional significance which translates them into beauty.

5. Meanwhile there is one further question that needs an answer before we are at liberty to turn to the actual form of Socrates' ethical teaching. Even supposing Socrates to have been a mystic, and to have felt toward moral values in a way that theory might easily translate into a belief in the existence of ideal Forms, how are we to tell where Socrates leaves off and Plato begins, in view of the

fact that there are some things at any rate in the dialogues that cannot easily be regarded as historical? It may be that this is an insurmountable difficulty, and that the dividing line is one which there is no longer any way of pointing out. Nevertheless there are certain principles here that possess some plausibility, and that seem to render possible a measure of assurance.

The first of these helps at least to set a lower limit. The argument that Plato is not likely to have lent himself to an essential misrepresentation of his predecessor in view of his own personal relations to him cannot, as has been said, mean that he has been anything like a literal historian of Socrates' views. He may have, and undoubtedly he has, put words in Socrates' mouth which Socrates could not well have uttered. But the argument, if valid at all, carries one definite implication. If Plato is restrained by any sense of historical reality, then, while it is conceivable that he might hold himself justified at times in attributing what actually were his own thoughts to Socrates, this would be on only one condition—that he believed them to be directly implied in things that Socrates really did teach. The line would be no hard-and-fast one, but nevertheless it would exist. And as the theoretical deductions got farther and farther from their starting-point we should expect to find, as we do find, a growing hesitation in making Socrates responsible for them, until at last he ceases almost wholly to be the mouthpiece of the Platonic speculations.

It follows that while we can be tolerably assured that Socrates really held that mystical belief in an absolute good which in logical language translates itself into a realism of universals, we ought perhaps to hesitate a little before concluding that of necessity this last inference was actually drawn by him. There is no inherent improbability that it was so drawn. But also by itself the supposition is quite possible that Plato was the first to call attention to it; for there would be no impiety, and no failure in

artistic truth, if he were merely uncovering assumptions he saw to be implicit in his master's teaching. Which alternative is to be preferred depends upon the presence or absence of further evidence.

And in considering this evidence, we may revert first to a point which has been already mentioned, and which suggests a second and more positive principle of demarcation. In a mere series of expanding logical deductions there is no compelling reason for stopping at one point rather than another. But a characteristic personality or temperamental point of view supplies a more promising standard. It is conceivable, perhaps, that Plato's was so complex a character as to combine both the mystic and the scientific rationalist, in different contemporaneous compartments, or as different phases of development. But it is at least equally reasonable to work on the hypothesis that he is portraying in Socrates a personality more or less different from his own. And in that case, since the maturer Plato, at any rate, is pretty well known to us, it is not hopeless to expect that, by using the two concrete types as a touchstone, we may be in a position to reach conclusions about matters of detail, provided any difference of doctrine is to be detected in the dialogues comparable to these differences of character. And as a matter of fact such a difference can be pointed out.

6. It has not always been sufficiently emphasized that the doctrine of Ideas assumes two fairly distinct and characteristic forms. In what roughly may be classed as the earlier and less metaphysical of two main groups of Plato's dialogues—and not including the *Republic*—the attitude adopted toward the Forms is primarily an ethical one; and, furthermore, it represents an interest not in terms of speculative ethics, but of ethics as a discipline or way of life. Here, as has appeared already, Socrates is shown as one whose final quest is a mystical vision of absolute truth which is also absolute goodness and absolute beauty. For

this attitude, the notion of contemplative blessedness and that of holiness are inextricably intermingled. Holiness is the condition of that mystic immortality which mortal nature craves.[7] Such a craving gets partial expression in a desire for fame or for children.[8] But it is only fully realized as all the trivial interests of this earthly life are cast aside, and the soul comes into the presence of what is really and eternally true. Philosophy is the preparation for this perfect vision. Through it the soul undergoes a process of purgation from sensual delights which estrange it from the Good. But complete attainment can come only when death has released the soul wholly from the body, and it has come pure and blameless to the heavenly regions after a life of devotion to the disinterested search for truth.

Unless it is assumed, then, that almost any combination of temperaments is possible in a man of genius, we are in possession of a standard any large deviation from which will require explanation. Now the fact is that, beginning with the *Republic* in particular, we do find subtle but important changes in the intellectual portrait of Socrates. On the surface there is still much in common; but underneath there has been a significant shift of emphasis.

The underlying character of this change may be expressed by saying that the goal of philosophy has ceased to be mystic vision, and has become, instead, rational understanding. Since the two may so readily be expressed in the same verbal terms, it is easy to overlook the difference; but the difference is real nevertheless. A comparison of the metaphor of the winged horses with the famous analogy of the Cave will help to bring out the divergence. In the earlier presentations, it is the ethical interest that is uppermost in Plato's description of the soul and its relation to the body. It is the sensual, not the sensible, that clogs the soul and drags it downward; the life of sense cuts us off from the vision of the Good because our passions and

[7] *Meno* 81

[8] *Symposium* 206*sq*.

pleasures engross the attention, and turn it away from eternal objects to the trivialities of this passing world. But from the *Republic* onward the emphasis tends to pass from ethics to metaphysics. The great problem now becomes how knowledge of these eternal verities is possible; and the fundamental source of our human imperfection changes, accordingly, from pleasure to sense perception, and to the metaphysically unreal character of perceptual objects.

The more it is examined, the more far-reaching will the influence of this shifting of interest from ethics to epistemology appear to be. The life of intellect ceases to be a mystical purification for another and higher world, and scientific knowledge becomes an end in itself. A systematic realm of Ideas, in which logical and mathematical concepts grow increasingly prominent, displaces those simple ideas of goodness and beauty whose very lack of sharp definition has helped to suggest the supreme values of existence; reason turns aside from the goal of contemplative blessedness and becomes the professional thinker's instrument for resolving logical contradictions; and the purgation of the mysteries is rationalized into the removal of man's ignorance, or education by dialectic.[9] A striking illustration of this change is furnished by a feature common to the two pictures—the exaltation of the philosophic life. In the earlier Socrates, this means a life freed from the fetters of the body—a freedom attainable even here and now in the occasional moments of mystical experience, though only completely attained in another form of existence when the body has been left behind. But in its later expressions the ideal of the philosophic life assumes quite another form; as it appeals to Plato himself, it is the life of pure scientific activity, released from the obligation to return to the Cave and take one's part in the work of the state.[10] A life apart from the body, however, and a life apart from the world of politics and business, stand for practical ideals of two

[9] *Sophist* 231.

[10] *Theætetus* 173-5; *Republic* VII.

very different sorts; and it is only slightly less difficult to think of Plato the scientist and metaphysician as committed to the first ideal, than it is to think of Socrates the talker, with his divine mission to stir the sluggish minds of his fellow citizens and his reluctance to get away from the busy affairs of men even for a country walk, as setting his heart on the quiet and remoteness of the scholar's life.

And there are various other things to add to this. For Plato the Ideas, since they stand for scientific and dialectic truth, naturally will be open only to the elect few; the rest of the world can never be expected to believe in anything absolute.[11] As Socrates views it, on the other hand, the recognition of Ideas is due not to metaphysical competence, but to the vision of them in another existence; they may be uncovered by questioning in the most unpromising material, and, in general, they are the property of human nature rather than of a professional class of philosophers. This exaltation of the philosopher is characteristic only of the later treatment. With Socrates it is philosophy alone that counts, the purifying power of the vision of truth; and it is hardly credible that he would not have found in the notion of a professional class of dialecticians, if it had occurred to him, the same source of ironical amusement that he found in the professional scientists and the professional Sophists. It also is worth noticing that the attitude of the earlier Socrates toward non-intellectual processes is more what we should expect from a mystic than Plato's rather harsh and unsympathetic treatment. It is true that Socrates finds the poets, as well as the politicians and the artisans, unable to give a clear account of their meaning. But he does not single them out for condemnation, or adopt that hostility toward the poet's art to which Plato's logic led him in defiance of his instincts. True poetry is God conversing with us;[12] it is no more to be deprecated than are the oracles which also come by

[11] *Republic* 493-4.

[12] *Ion* 534.

inspiration rather than by reason, but which on that very account are to be preferred to the human wisdom that has little or no value.[13] It is natural that inspiration should play in the mystic's life a rôle that is absent in the rationalist's. And so we find Socrates glorifying a divine madness as the special gift of heaven, and the source of the chiefest blessings among men;[14] while in his own conduct dreams and divination have an importance which they obviously never had for Plato.

We are not without strong reasons for supposing, then, that Plato himself supplies a test by which, if we do not attempt to go too much into detail, we may separate the real Socrates and his teachings from the additions which Plato was led to make as his own independent thinking revealed what seemed to him the logical implications of Socrates' standpoint. Whenever the Socrates of the dialogues is standing for an ethical idealism, in terms of the mystical pursuit of those vague but preëminently real values which the terms goodness and beauty suggest, we apparently have no sound reason for refusing to believe that Plato is intending to present to us the actual historical outlines of his master. When, on the other hand, the interest of the dialogues turns to a logical analysis of the way in which the ideal is known, and to the relation between sense perception and the higher truth, the strong probability is that we are listening to Plato rather than to Socrates. And to this the external testimony also points; for Aristotle not only leaves a strong impression that Socrates' intellectual interests stopped with ethics, but he states explicitly that the theory of sensible phenomena belongs to Plato.

This will not mean that Socrates had no theory at all about the way we know Ideas. There is weighty evidence that he did hold such a theory. The doctrine of knowledge as *recollection* is assigned to Socrates so unequivocally and

[13] *Apology* 23.

[14] *Phædrus* 244.

emphatically by Plato, as one which he was notoriously fond of setting forth, that Plato's veracity would seem almost to be involved. But the theory of recollection itself goes to enforce the distinction that has just been drawn. For this is a speculation on an entirely different level from that analysis of knowledge as scientific method in which the real Plato is interested; and indeed it drops out of sight as soon as such an interest appears.[15] It is a mystical solution, based on the Pythagorean notion of metempsychosis rather than on logical analysis. It still remains subsidiary, therefore, to the ethical significance which this doctrine has for Socrates; for it sensible reality enters into the situation, not as a problem to be solved, but simply as lending itself to the practical service of suggesting to our minds the ideal pattern which has lapsed from memory.

If we are justified in adopting the conclusions just set forth, we are now ready to return to the main problem, and ask what light they throw, if any, on the doctrine that virtue is knowledge, together with its various corollaries.

7. There is one simple meaning attaching to the claim that virtue is knowledge, which is relatively beyond dispute. Not only in Xenophon, but in Plato as well, Socrates is made to argue that only intelligence insures true happiness; that the things men call good are in reality only good when they are in possession of the wise man rather than the fool; that the unexamined life which takes the ends of conduct for granted without understanding them is hardly worth the living. And such proofs that virtue and happiness are impossible without knowledge are then more than once converted directly into the proposition that they *are* knowledge.[16] That Socrates argued in this way we have no special reason to doubt. And if we stop here, therefore, we should have to conclude that his epoch-making doctrine

[15] *Cf. Philebus* 34, where reminiscence is defined psychologically in a way that reverses what it meant for Socrates.

[16] *Cf. Euthydemus* 281; *Meno* 88.

consisted of little more than a set of rather obvious practical considerations plus a logical fallacy.

But it is impossible to do justice to Socrates' influence without recognizing that two distinct strains run through his utterances, whose combination constitutes, indeed, his uniqueness as a teacher. As Alcibiades tells us in the *Symposium,*[17] while on the surface his words might seem matter-of-fact and homely, even ridiculously so, for one who had the eyes to see they were the vestments of a hidden beauty which stirred the soul, and called forth a response from all that was best and noblest in his hearers. It follows that we are not on safe ground if we take the easiest and most commonplace interpretation as adequate to Socrates' full meaning. And even apart from the danger that the shrewd and homely traits of common sense in Socrates may lead us to overlook the other and more distinctive side, it is clear from Plato that allowance, too, has to be made for the requirements of Socrates' method of interrogation. For since it is the essence of this method to adopt as its starting-point some proposition on which his interlocutor is prepared to agree, in proportion to the interest he takes in showing up human ignorance will be the likelihood that the assumptions on which the discussion proceeds fall short of Socrates' own beliefs.

And Plato himself points us to another and more adequate interpretation of the Socratic dictum. In the *Phædo,* in particular, virtue is expressly made to stand for something higher than civic or moral excellence, with its background of utilitarian caution.[18] It is not prudence or practical intelligence, but passion and insight—that vision of eternal goodness which has been seen to constitute the highest goal of human nature. And not only does this render the doctrine that virtue is knowledge more significant, but it makes it for the first time really intelligible. If goodness is not utility, but an absolute and emotion-stirring value, then

[17] *Symposium* 221-2.

[18] *Phædo* 82-4.

alone is it possible to see how, without a logical fallacy, knowledge should come to be regarded, not as a *means* to happiness or virtue, but as virtue itself. The essence of virtue is the response of human nature to the best and highest; it is the insight which is at once knowledge and emotional love. Grant the mystic's standpoint, and this is the only possible conclusion. The knowledge with which virtue is identified must be what he, the mystic, means by knowledge; and this is not ratiocination, but the blessedness of contemplation.

And this explains, too, the related doctrine that evil is always due to ignorance, in a way at least as convincing as does the utilitarian consideration—though this was likewise doubtless used by Socrates in arguing with the worldling—that no one will voluntarily do that which is to his own ultimate hurt. If the knowledge of the Good is to be identified with a mystic fervor of insight, it is easy to see how, for Socrates, it would appear incredible that conduct should not flow inevitably from the perception of that which stirs our immediate love and reverence; if virtuous conduct does not follow, it must be because this vision of the real beauty of righteousness is lacking. And in the same way it explains why the virtues are one, not many; the moral life is not a compound of separate powers but a unity of insight, and from this vision of things as they truly are every virtue alike will flow.

8. To this interpretation, however, one fundamental objection will be raised that at first might seem to be decisive. Socrates' chief merit has usually been taken to be that he was the originator of a new scientific method in the field of ethics—the method of logical definition; he is conceived as having spent his life in an endeavor to define the virtues and the nature of the good. And it is true that Plato does at times tend to convey such an impression; while for Aristotle this apparently stands for Socrates' main philosophic claim to consideration.

But we must not forget that both these philosophers had a strong technical interest of their own in scientific methodology. If therefore they thought themselves to have discovered, in Socrates' way of arguing, something which, when made explicit, could be utilized for a theory of method, they would certainly have called attention to it even had Socrates' own interest been of a different sort. As a matter of fact the internal evidence for the common view is singularly weak. Concretely Socrates' dialectic he himself regards as incidental to his ethical purpose; it is his divine mission as a gadfly of the state that explains the form it takes, and not the technical and sophisticated interest of the scientist. It is even doubtful whether he could really have cared very much for the results of method, in the form of accurate definitions. When one stops to think about it, it must seem a little strange that, if Socrates had made it his main business to define the virtues, he should not have had some results to show at the close of a life extended beyond the usual period. Certainly the rather pitiful results that Xenophon reports would not have been beyond him. But to the end he continues to insist on his own lack of knowledge, and to assign to dialectic a negative rather than a positive value. And this is far more understandable if the demand for definitions was primarily a tool for exposing ignorance than if it was the quest for a scientific terminology.

It is true that a call for clear thinking is at the bottom of Socrates' whole activity. But it is to the clarification of the ends of conduct, and of men's confused ideas about what is really good and worthy, that his dialectic really tends, rather than to a technique of scientific concepts. Indeed, this is just what gives Socrates a real claim to originality. The working method of the ethical life is not induction, in the sense that it gets at human ends by generalizing past facts and deeds. It is precisely a matter of determining what is genuinely worth while. And for this

we have to presuppose, just as Socrates did, the existence in each man of standards of value which are ultimate; though also at the start they are vague and muddled and have to be cleared up and verified by an analysis of their nature and their consequences. In any case, it is only on this showing that we have a natural explanation of the paucity of results in Socrates' positive teaching. If his aim was definition then he was a failure, and a rather unaccountable one. But if his real purpose was to get men to discover in their own experience the nature of their ultimate standards of worth, or, in the language of the mystic, to point them to the vision of absolute goodness and beauty, the failure to arrive at technical concepts is a matter of no consequence. An ostentatious proclamation of an inability to reach knowledge is not unnatural in the mystic, and does not at all touch the certainty of his immediate vision of the good; it is hardly in place in the professed scientist and logician.

Socrates' interest lies, then, in the soul and not in logic. But because the soul's destiny is a vision of the good, it is in knowledge that its virtue may be said to lie; while also knowledge of a lower grade is needed, in the form of clear logical analysis, and of the utilitarian judgments of good horse sense, to help restore the dim visions which we bring with us into the world, and which have been overlaid by unthinking custom and by an indulgence of the bodily passions. In so far as Xenophon misses this he fails to give us a true picture. At the same time Xenophon's testimony does not need to be entirely discarded; and it is usually possible to pick out with some measure of confidence the modicum of truth which it contains.

9. The case that is most important for the history of ethical theory has to do with Socrates' attitude toward pleasure. Xenophon tells us in plain terms that Socrates was, so far as theory goes, a utilitarian; he taught that utility is what determines not only the goodness of an act,

but even the beauty of an object. This is an opinion difficult to reconcile with a mystical idealism. And, furthermore, there is abundant evidence, some of it from Xenophon himself, of a personal attitude on the part of Socrates which suggests a different conclusion. Certainly he is always represented as himself totally indifferent to pleasure or to worldly success; and Plato even makes him argue explicitly against the prudential conception of the virtues, as only an inverted self-indulgence.[19]

It might seem easier, therefore, to set aside Xenophon's testimony as out of harmony with better established evidence. But there are reasons against quite so drastic a course. Not only does the Platonic Socrates also occasionally use language not very dissimilar to Xenophon's, but it is scarcely credible that a school of professed hedonism should have sprung from Socrates' teaching had Aristippus not found in his words some apparent support. This last consideration, however, it has to be noticed, applies equally to the other and quite opposed type of ethical doctrine that also claimed the authority of Socrates—the Cynicism of Antisthenes, with its contempt for pleasure. Accordingly the problem is to discover how three distinct and opposed ethical philosophies should have had their source in one man's teaching.

One conclusion follows pretty directly from the existence of the problem; and it adds further assurance to the thesis that Socrates' interest in philosophy is of a relatively non-technical sort. It seems unlikely that Socrates himself could ever have directly raised the question, "Is pleasure the good?" Not only would the striking difference of opinion among his followers in that case be difficult to understand, but it is not easy to envisage Socrates the mystic as taking serious interest in such a question. This granted, there are two or three considerations that go a

[19] *Phædo* 68-9.

certain way toward dispelling the impression of inconsistency.

And first there needs to be noticed the nature of the personal attitude attributed to Socrates. It is not that he feels an ascetic hostility toward enjoyment. Socrates recommends self-control and moderation, the life of few wants and simple satisfactions; and he protests against the tendency of pleasure to seduce man from his true interests. But the point in both cases is the same. The case against pleasure is not its evil and sinister importance, but its insignificance. It occupies us with trivial matters when we might be engaged with a vision of the absolute; it entails unnecessary anxieties and disproportionate effort for what in the end is not worth the trouble. And consequently we are not to give it an undesirable eminence; it is enough that we should refuse to let it dominate us. This, the logical corollary of his doctrine, is the attitude we are told that Socrates personally adopted. He did not practice asceticism; and on occasion he could drink his companions under the table. But he drank, not for the pleasure it gave him, but as an incident in the day's work; and he was just as well satisfied to go without.

It is obviously this side of Socrates' teaching and example that, by an exaggeration of emphasis, developed into the Cynicism of Antisthenes. Much less significant, as an aspect of Socrates' own thought, is the hedonism of Aristippus. This would be scarcely understandable, once more, if Socrates had thought pleasure important enough to go out of his way to define its relation to the good. But because pleasure so emphatically is not the good, it is possible to see how he might have allowed himself to say things from which, taken by themselves, an impression of theoretic hedonism might have been derived. There is no reason to suppose that Socrates would have refused to identify man's destiny with happiness; the vision of the good is plainly the

best and highest kind of happiness. And since it is practically impossible always to use language in a way that makes a sharp distinction between happiness and pleasure, he may very well have talked at times in a manner open to misunderstanding by a literal-minded hearer. And to this one needs to add the further fact, already noticed, that the nature of Socrates' method makes it necessary constantly to accept and argue on the premises of his interlocutor. And if, in a discussion with Protagoras, he takes for granted popular judgments which he is aware that Protagoras will not dispute, only a total disregard of what we know about his habits can justify an unqualified assumption that he must have been expressing his personal opinions. Even Plato, whose views about pleasure are sufficiently clear, can talk like an ordinary hedonist when he is framing the preamble to a legal statute, intended to convince not the philosopher but the average citizen.[20]

The other outstanding feature of Xenophon's account—the disposition of Socrates to identify virtue in practice with an acquiescence in existing law and custom—it is still less difficult to explain without accepting the emphasis that Xenophon assigns it. That Socrates felt a genuine piety toward the state, as the mother and guardian of her children, would need no further evidence than the *Crito,* where he justifies his refusal to escape from prison at the cost of bringing discredit on the lawful forms of government. But it is a far cry from the recognition that a virtuous man will not wantonly disregard his country's laws, to the claim that virtue consists mainly in conventionality and conformism. In all likelihood the traditional opinion is right in supposing that Socrates was not in sympathy with the Sophistic tendency toward loosening the bonds of the customary morality. But it may be reasonably conjectured that this was due less to a belief in its final value than to a feeling,

[20] *Laws* 733-4.

common to the mystic temperament, that no reform of conventions, aiming mostly as it does at greater privileges for the individual, is much worth troubling over; along perhaps with a skeptical distrust of the power of human reason to accomplish satisfactorily such a task.

CHAPTER II

GREEK ETHICS (*continued*)

PLATO

1. IN passing from Socrates to the most eminent of his disciples, there is available a much larger fund of reliable information, which includes, even, some of Plato's personal correspondence. But in spite of the wealth of written material, more especially in his own dialogues and in the voluminous criticisms of his pupil Aristotle, the approach to Plato's ethical philosophy is also attended with considerable difficulty. Aside from doubts that may be raised about the allowance it is necessary to make for the literary man in Plato, especially where the teachings of Socrates are involved, it has to be remembered that the writings that have come down to us cover a period of forty years or more, during which some changes of opinion are naturally to be expected; while at the same time the order of the dialogues, on which any thesis of a development in Plato's thought would have to rest, can only be determined conjecturally. This last difficulty is more prominent in connection with his metaphysical beliefs than with his ethics. But Plato's ethical opinions cannot be satisfactorily dealt with in separation from his "theory of ideas." And it is a further and particularly serious drawback that about the interpretation of this doctrine scholars are still far from in agreement.

A beginning has been made toward dealing with these difficulties in the previous chapter. And on the supposition that the ethical mysticism of the dialogues goes back to Socrates, there would appear to be a reasonable probability

that Plato's own initial contribution on a large scale to the theory of ethics is to be looked for in the *Republic*. Many of the thoughts incorporated here may have been suggested to him originally by things he had heard Socrates say. But it also seems clear that in the *Republic* Plato is taking a step, and probably his first important step, toward amplifying and systematizing the Socratic insight in the direction of a philosophy of his own. The mere fact that the dialogue as a whole is a single reasoned argument, is enough to indicate that we are no longer dealing directly with the historic Socrates. Instead, Plato is raising certain speculative questions about the legacy he has inherited of a more technical sort than can safely be attributed to his predecessor; and, unlike Socrates, he has a specific solution to suggest—a solution which on the whole shows the same type of mind and interest that meets us in the later developments of his thought.

2. Speaking very generally, and disregarding its individual peculiarities, Plato's ethical theory belongs to a class of theories which still holds its own—indeed rather more than holds its own—in the history of speculation. As against competing attempts to define the ethical life in such terms as pleasure, utility, moral duty, and the like, the characteristically Greek point of view, of which Plato and Aristotle both are representatives, starts from the idea of "function," or "conformity to type." More simply, it supposes that man, like every other form of being, has a specific ideal character or essence which in the ordinary course of nature he tends to realize. In modern language we have come to call this the "organic" conception; and while recent science would interpret the character that constitutes an organic type in a much looser and more plastic way than Plato does, still the gist of the matter is the same. There exists, that is, in a living creature some more or less well-defined predisposition toward a particular sort of outcome in which its undeveloped powers will receive expression

and fruition; and when the outcome is achieved the being is said to have attained its proper end. Virtue is that quality in a man which enables him to realize his preappointed end, or to function in the manner nature meant him to. Happiness, or well-being, is the state in which this consummation has been reached. And the end itself, conceived as an ideal toward which the essential urge of his being is directed, is what constitutes, for man at least, the good.

Such a general thesis has plainly a good deal in its favor. As a logical instrument, it provides at any rate a useful starting-point for ethical analysis. If we try to begin with something more concrete, and say that justice, for example, is a good, it is always open to inquire *why* it is a good. Why, as Adeimantus asks Socrates in the *Republic,* should a man act justly if he stands to gain nothing by it, and may even be involved in loss? And the claim that he has a certain essence or natural constitution, and that this determines wherein lies his proper good, has the appearance of going deeper, in a way likely to carry conviction to the speculative intelligence seeking relief from the compulsion of an indefinite series of "whys." Pleasures, as Socrates points out, may be either good or bad. Even knowledge may appear at times to be of doubtful value. But anyone, it would seem, might be prepared to say without qualification that he wants the good, if good is definable as the satisfaction of an end that is in some sense "according to nature," and so the very essence of the man himself.

However, this is far too indefinite as yet to constitute a philosophy. Philosophers might agree that man has an ideal nature in which his true end and satisfaction will be found; but it still would be open to them to differ widely about the way in which this nature is to be described. Accordingly we shall have to ask what the conception meant for Plato more concretely.

It is to the wisdom and literary charm which Plato has

embodied in his concrete delineation of the principles that govern a certain ideal conception of the noble life that the profound influence he has exerted on the modern world is largely due. Its power can only be adequately felt by turning to Plato's own pages; and a brief and summary reproduction, in particular, is bound to fail signally in conveying it. The task is simplified, however, in that Plato is not creating *de novo* an ideal of his own; he has a background determined by the fact that he is a Greek of Athens in the fourth century B.C. His own thinking leads him to modify this historical background to an extent, and to criticize some of its details; and the nature of such modifications it will be the business of the historian of ethics to point out. But the foundation is supplied by the special type of human ideal which the modern man has come to have in mind when he speaks of the "Greek view of life," and which is an idealized form of the highly sophisticated civilization into which Plato was born.

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Reduced to its simplest terms, the ideal which Plato holds in common with the cultivated Athenian gentleman of his day is the ideal of a life that shows moderation in desire, that aims at a rounded development rather than an intensity of one-sided satisfaction, that draws back from extremes of every sort—the ideal of "nothing too much." In its earlier and more naïve form, its professed motive is commonly found in a fear of arousing the envy of the gods, who naturally do not care for human ambitions that risk threatening their own superiority; and then, with the increasing moralization of thought, this gets a more adequate expression in the feeling that wealth and power, grown too great, are bound to lead to excesses that will call forth righteous vengeance. But behind even the former of these rationalizations there must always have existed some vague standard of what is in itself natural and proper to human pretensions, deviations from which call for condemnation—a standard due in part to a perception of the conditions which

social stability demands, and partly to that instinctive love of order and proportion which gave to the race its preëminence in art. The competing ideal which Callicles, for example, professes in the *Gorgias*—the indulgence of all the appetites to their utmost limit so long as this is consistent with precautions against external disaster—though it might be followed in practice by individuals, was one with which typically the Greek genius had little sympathy.

There is a second distinguishable aspect of the Greek conception, which likewise enters very intimately into its portrayal in Plato's pages. The ideal of "nothing too much" applies to human life on either of two sides. It may have its meaning in a view of individual human nature, such as at the present day is perhaps best summed up in what is known as "culture"; and in Athens, at any rate, this notion of a well-rounded self-completeness was an important ingredient in the ideal. But also it never was forgotten that true measure and harmony are determined not merely, or chiefly, by an internal standard, but still more by man's relation to his habitat, and especially to the community of which he is a part. Excessive human pretensions have primarily a social bearing. It is their chief condemnation that they disturb those orderly and seemly forms of life which are sanctioned by religion and the state, and release man from a due sense of his subordination to the larger Nature on which his own private nature is dependent. They relax the bonds of piety toward the gods; and instead of permitting each individual to remain quietly in the groove for which nature meant him, and perform in the interest of the whole the best service for which he personally is fitted, they bring instability and chaos into the community, and turn upside down the proper relationship of men and classes.

It is this insistence on the traditional view of man as no isolated unit, but as a member of the state who finds his well-being only in and through the state, that is peculiarly responsible for lending to the Greek ideal of human good

the tone of distinction which is so pronounced in Plato's treatment. A social conception of man always can claim a suggestion of nobility in which its more individualistic competitors seem naturally deficient. The interpretation of his destiny in terms of his own interests or pleasures can never escape a touch of the intellectually commonplace, however amiable and attractive it may be made. This appeal to the prejudice against certain forms of human life as "low" constitutes one of Plato's most effective weapons of debate. Even the more apparently defensible turn which modern thought has given to the ideal of individual culture is apt to have, through its dependence on a psychology of the inner life, a flavor of sentimentality to which Plato is a stranger. The intellectual austerity and objectivity of his own standards leave no place for the intensive cultivation of the feelings, whose mere presence softens moral fiber, and whose outward expression is unworthy the fine poise of the philosophic mind. And it is to the emphasis on the "social" side of human nature that the contrast here is in considerable measure due. Few men can remain altogether unimpressed by the manifestations of the common life that take established institutional forms. These have a solidity and impressiveness in comparison with which prviate forms of good are likely to appear unimportant and unreal. Reason in terms of such objective manifestations seems somehow to be *more* rational, and to carry a greater power and dignity, than in its personal and subjective aspects; and man becomes most admirable when, in their interest, he is minimizing or suppressing the claims of his body or his private self.

3. In a general way, then, we are justified in characterizing Plato's interpretation of the concrete good by reference to the typically Greek view of human life. But the philosopher must be prepared to go further. As the ideal is actually portrayed by Plato it is too unwieldly, too loaded with detail, to serve the purposes of speculative thought.

For one thing, it is not exact enough as yet to offer a principled basis for the corrections and modifications which he is interested in defending. For this, some more limited aspect of the situation needs pointing out, which shall be at once so specific, and so logically central, as to supply a critical standard. To illustrate in terms of another and relate concept, what do we really mean by "happiness"? The question is not sufficiently answered, for the theorist, by a description of the various elements that enter into the happy life. He will want to locate the essence of the notion. And if someone were to say that, for example, the essential element in happiness is the presence of a peculiar feeling tone of satisfaction, while he might not accept the answer as a valid one, he would at least recognize that it is the *sort* of answer he is after. What then, similarly, is the dominant feature that makes one type of living rather than another the "good" for man? What enables us to identify it with a true and adequate expression of human "function"?

One very common way which Plato has of putting his case is by describing the good life as the "health" of the soul; and the physical connotation of this word health plays a large part in the immediate persuasiveness of his doctrine. No one is likely to deny that bodily health is a fundamental condition of human satisfaction; with the bodily constitution gone, as Socrates somewhere remarks, life would be unendurable even though pampered with all sorts of meats and drinks and in possession of unlimited wealth and power. And by analogy it will seem natural to acquiesce also in the claim that no life is worth the living when the essential nature of the soul has become corrupted and unsound. After all, however, this *is* an analogy; and as such it makes the answer appear simpler than it really is. Health is so readily accepted as a good, because everyone is aware that only the healthy body is the source of permanent and appealing pleasures; the indulgence of the appetites without regard to the proper functioning of the body as a whole carries so

many drawbacks as in the long run to be unacceptable. But when we pass to the regions of the soul, the meaning of the claim becomes decidedly more uncertain; the health of the soul, before it can offer a principle of interpretation, needs itself to be interpreted.

In a formal way, Plato makes plain enough the sense which he attaches to the phrase. "Health" is the state in which the various parts of the soul stand in their proper relationship of subordination—a definition suggested by his previous account of the just or healthy state as one where the different classes are similarly subordinated and kept each to the task for which it is most fitted. Rather more concretely, this means a condition of soul where reason rules, where the senses and the passions obey, and where the active and energetic side of man's nature assists, under the direction of reason, in keeping the lower elements in order. Put briefly, the principle of the good life is the principle of *intelligence.*

But here again the principle calls for further interpretation before it can be applied. What do we mean by the supremacy of reason, and *why* should it be supreme? There are several possibilities in the way of answering this, and some of them are plainly inadequate to Plato's meaning. This is particularly evident in the case of its simplest and most natural significance. The Greek conception in its everyday form was grounded in substantial measure on the dictates of common sense and mental sanity; the prudent man who restrains his desires within the bounds of moderation has the best chance on the whole of living happily and coming to a peaceful end. This utilitarianism Plato does not, in its place, refuse to utilize. He is continually pointing out that vice and unrestrained lusts poison the sources of happiness; that injustice and immoderate ambition cut a man off from normal human relationships and surround him with constant dangers and alarms; that political disorders weaken the foundations of the state and of the common

life; and that even in another world wickedness is pursued by divine penalties. Moderation resting on an intelligent appreciation of consequences, and the substitution of rational choice, in the light of these consequences, for the push and pull of chaotic desires, is really essential to any successful experiment in living.

But Plato is far from being prepared to stop with this and to accept a far-sighted utilitarian prudence as the final justification of the good life. Everyone would like to see justice triumph and carry with it the obvious rewards of success and happiness; and only so can it very easily be recommended to the popular taste. But it is the whole purpose of the argument in the *Republic* to prove that this is not after all the fundamental thing, and that equally in the absence of the consequences that are prized and denominated good in common speech—even, indeed, in connection with what ordinarily are esteemed the greatest evils—the orderly and healthy life is still to be preferred to the diseased and vicious one. Such a life is in itself a good and needs no extraneous aids.

Similarly we may eliminate another ground that might be given for the superiority of reason. Plato himself on occasion urges that the life of intellect is attended by a pleasure which, if less intense than the pleasures of the senses, is incomparably purer and higher, as is shown by the fact that the philosopher, to whom all types of pleasure are open, prefers and chooses it above all others. But he never shows any disposition to use this hedonistic quality to account for the place which reason holds in human nature. When he is speaking most to the point, his argument tends almost invariably to take a more direct line. It is neither the pleasures of intellect, nor its utilitarian service, that explains the rule of reason over the senses. Mind rules, because self-evidently it has the right to rule through its own peculiar fitness. To the philosopher it needs no proving that there is a natural order in the soul, and that what is

higher must of necessity be in control over what is of lesser dignity and worth; anything else will be the revolt of a rebellious subject against the true prince of whom he is the natural vassal.[1] Or if we will be satisfied with a proof that is after all no more than a restatement of the thing to be explained, any faculty in man is superior in proportion as it comes into closer contact with reality; and the life of knowledge, therefore, takes precedence not because it is enjoyable or useful, but because it alone introduces us to the nobler world of true being.[2]

Empirically, then, wherever this may lead us in the end, we would seem to have located the peculiar quality that determines Plato's judgment of the good. The essence of goodness lies not in consequences of any sort, but directly in the unchanging relationships that underlie the rational organization of the soul and the proper subordination of its several parts; and mind derives its supremacy not from its happy outcome, but just because the true object of the intellect is order, proportion, law.[3] There is for Plato something inherently delightful in stable and exact relationships, whether in the field of pure mathematics, in the orderly procession of the heavens, in the seemly subordination of individuals and classes in a well-regulated state, or in the austere harmony of a life governed by philosophy; useful consequences may enhance this goodness, but they do not create it in the first place. It is worth noting that this same predilection is conspicuous in connection also with the things that Plato rejects from his ideal. About the positive place of pleasure in the scheme of things Plato is frequently obscure. But on the negative side he makes himself perfectly clear; and his criticism is based primarily on an instinctive repugnance to excess, disorder, disproportion, and the haphazard life of license and riot that results from an undisciplined gratification of the lower sides of man's

[1] *Cf. Republic* 353, 431, 444, 589-90; *Phædo* 80; *Laws* 689.
[2] *Republic* 585 *et al.*
[3] *Cf. Republic* 587; *Gorgias* 504, 506.

nature. When he inveighs against pleasure, what most commonly he has in mind is its aberrations, the slavery to the appetites, the overestimating of particular gratifications and their relative importance; and it is in opposition to this that he sets up the standard of an orderly, harmonious, healthy living.

4. At this point, however, it becomes necessary to bring in a new consideration, which conceivably may put a different face on Plato's fundamental concept of end or function as it has hitherto appeared. The seeds of the new inquiry lie in the conception itself. So far it has been assumed, with Plato, that when we have discovered man's natural end we also have discovered, self-evidently, his good. But after all, when we look more closely, the two terms do not seem identical. It is not quite obvious why, when any object is satisfying the end for which it is fitted or designed, we should go on to call this also a *good* end; why not simply stop with saying that it *is* its end or nature? This at least is what we do in the case of things designed by man. A machine which does the work it was meant to do is called a good machine. But this, unless it is taken to imply some further relation to our own needs or wishes, merely intends to say that we have a factual case of nice adjustment between means and preappointed outcome; the end itself is neither good nor bad, but simply *is*. And why should that which is designed by nature have any different footing? Why should we take the trouble to add to the statement of fact another kind of judgment—a "value" judgment—such as is implied in the adjective good? The two instances may very well somehow differ. But the point is that this difference, if it exists, ought to be accounted for; and therefore we need to amplify the claim that man is attaining the end of his natural being before we have the right to call this end a good.

Presumably, in Plato's case, this right must be given us by something that is involved in the conception of rational

order as such. And here on the surface there lies a further implication which is of vital importance for interpreting Plato's thought. There have been two main conceptions of the proper method for attacking problems of ethical theory. If we keep closely to the starting-point of empirical ethics, What is the greatest good *for man?* the natural thing will be to look for an answer primarily in an analysis of human nature itself; and psychology thus becomes the main instrument of ethical speculation. But in this a risk is present, which always has appealed to men of Plato's type—the risk, through a concern with subjective analysis, of losing sight of the demand for rational validity. And the more the Socratic insistence on the objective and non-empirical status of the good is taken seriously, the greater will the temptation be to allow this notion of the "good as such" to displace the notion of the "good for man," and to turn our attention, therefore, from human nature to the structure of the universe at large.

To such a metaphysical procedure Plato is obviously predisposed. Order and reason are not confined to man; indeed, we discover reason in its purity in proportion as we get away from man's affairs and look instead to the heavenly bodies in their orbits, or to the impersonal realm of mathematical relationships. The dignity of any human faculty we have already seen is borrowed from its object, and from the degree of metaphysical reality which this contains; and human virtues Plato always insists must be derivable from an ultimate sort of knowledge which alone brings us into contact with the good as such. This knowledge is dialectic, or the metaphysical account of true being in its essence.[3]

Interpreted sympathetically, these rival methods might not turn out to be mutually exclusive. No ethical philosopher, it is safe to say, can get along without psychology if he is to tell us anything significant about conduct; Plato himself has made free use of it. On the other hand any

[3] *Republic* 504, 506, 534.

sincere believer in morality will hesitate to deny that the moral ideal reveals in some sense a standard which points beyond itself—is, as we say, "objective"; and if man is a being causally dependent on a larger universe, as of course he is, it will not be surprising if some light is thrown on human nature by its objective environment and source. Nevertheless it will make a very real difference, in a search for human good, from which end we choose to start—whether we try to construct the ideal primarily from empirical values, and then use it to interpret the nature of reality, or whether we postpone the determination of these values to some theory of an absolute good, from which they are then to be derived by logic. This last enterprise it may turn out is feasible. But at least we cannot tell whether it is feasible or not until we know the actual way in which it is proposed to make the method work. And for this a more definite account of Plato's metaphysical beliefs will have first to be attempted.

5. Reasons have already been given for supposing that the "ideal" theory in its earlier form Plato had learned from Socrates, by whom it had been conceived in terms of an unchanging realm of distinct and separate universals, among which the ideas of the Good and of the Beautiful are by far the most outstanding. In any case, this appeared to Plato to be the immediate and obvious consequence of Socrates' ethical mysticism. And consequently no particular difficulty need be found when, in the *Parmenides,* he criticizes acutely the theory of Ideas, and raises difficulties which he neither there nor elsewhere really solves. It is not himself that he is criticizing, but what he regards as the logic of an earlier doctrine, much less sophisticated than the one he thinks of as his own.

The need for criticism first becomes insistent when we pass from Socrates' ethical interest in Ideas to the implications which they have for a metaphysics of reality and of knowledge. The immediate source of the new problem was,

as Aristotle reports, the philosophy of Heracleitus, and the conclusion which followed from it that the sensible world is in the strict sense incapable of being known. This empirical world Heracleitus had shown to be a world of relativity and continuous change; and if a thing changes, we cannot in an unqualified sense say that it *is*. Now anything that really deserves the name of knowledge must needs be indubitable and necessary, valid always and for everyone. The only sort of reality, therefore, we can truly "know," is one that is not infected with instability and change, but is absolute, eternal, perfect, and self-sufficient. And such reality can be reached only through the exercise of pure thought, or of reason unadulterated by the senses. It is right here, indeed, that conclusive evidence lies for the existence of the Idea; if we once admit, as Plato thinks we must admit, that there is such a thing as absolute and necessary knowledge which differs from fallible and changing opinion, such knowledge is bound to have an object of its own other than the changing world of sense.[4]

But as a consequence of this, Plato was confronted by a problem. Socrates, as a mystic, might afford to recognize the unreality of the sense world without feeling called upon to let it trouble him. But when attention has been turned from a pursuit of the vision of the good to a technical account of the nature of our human thinking, this is no longer possible; the two worlds—of knowledge and opinion—cannot be left alongside one another without some attempt at reconciliation. The mystic has a short-cut to an answer, by simply calling the sense world sheer illusion. But Plato is a rationalist and scientist looking for an intelligible explanation of phenomena; and anything that needs to be explained must have at least some modicum of reality. As a professor of political philosophy, too, he could not afford to get too far away from mundane facts. Accordingly, when he is expressing his own sentiments, Plato

[4] *Timæus* 51-2.

never abandons the realities of experience to put in their place an entirely different set of reals. What he everywhere is after is the firm rational foundation that shall render empirical facts themselves understandable, through the discovery of those eternal laws or Forms which alone make knowledge possible. So far as his intentions go, at any rate, "being" stands for the principles through which appearances are to be accounted for, and not explained away.

But it is quite another thing to locate Plato's own answer to the questions he has raised. It would simplify matters if we might suppose that he finally had reached a point of view in his philosophy from which, as in the comparable case of Hegel in more recent times, the problem itself drops away as unimportant and unreal. But not only are there indications that it exercised his mind even in his latest writings, but Aristotle constantly assumes that the difficulties still are present; and he is not likely to have given this impression if Plato had ever committed himself unambiguously to any definite way either of answering or of shelving them. It seems most likely that Plato never reached a satisfactory solution; though there are one or two suggestions which he makes that may have lain in his mind as possibly fruitful clews. This much at least is evident, however, that the particular difficulty which grows out of the relation of the ideal to the sensible world has in the later dialogues ceased to figure as the outstanding problem of philosophy, and instead Plato turns his attention to a connected field, which proved more fertile.

For "knowledge" is the source of certain logical problems that can be separated, for working purposes at any rate, from questions about the imperfect world of opinion and change, and can be investigated in their own right. In saying that an act *is* just, we at first appear to mean that a particular phenomenon in time is identified in some sense with a universal and timeless essence or Idea; it is in this way that the trouble about connecting the two worlds had arisen.

But the word "is" is ambiguous. In addition to its implication of existence, it serves also as the copula in a proposition or expressed judgment. And there had already arisen a lively controversy centering about "being" in this sense of "predication"; and considerable reputations had been made by philosophers through exploiting the subtleties attending on a theory of predication, in the form of an insistence, calculated to entangle in absurdities the logically inexpert, that when a man says "is," he cannot in any sense go on to say "is not." To the problems here involved, more especially as these develop inside the field of the more general Ideas, Plato accordingly addressed himself.

The first tendency had been to think of the Idea as separate and self-contained. But while this may satisfy the mystic, it is distinctly unsatisfactory to the scientific philosopher, since it is only through the coöperation of universal terms that any chance arises for scientific explanation; "the attempt at universal separation is the final annihilation of all reason, for only by the union of conceptions with one another do we attain to discourse of reason." [5] The problem here had been brought to light in its most startling form in the philosophy of Parmenides and Zeno, whose doctrine, that nothing whatever can be said of Being except that it *is* Being, and that Not-being simply is *not*, had made a scientific understanding of the world impossible. Plato realized that you must in some sense be able to combine Being and Not-being, "is" and "is not," if you are to say anything significant. And he found a solution in the thesis that when you say "is not," you do not really mean "does not exist," but only "is other than." Even that which in a certain sense is not may thus have a positive being of its own; the not-beautiful is no less a real existence than the beautiful.[6]

With this view of predication, it becomes possible to deal fruitfully with the rational demand for systematic connec-

[5] *Sophist* 259. [6] *Ibid.*, 254*sq.*

tion in the world of knowledge, not only in the form of scientific classification or division, but also in the way of organizing those more general and ubiquitous predicates which the mind uses in its judgments, and which after Aristotle came to be known as the Categories. Evidently these most universal terms, such as Being, Difference, Rest, and Motion, must be capable of standing in some relationship to one another if we are not to be confined to the bare statement that Being is Being, Motion is Motion, and the like. On the other hand, not every category can be predicated of every other; we can say, for example, that rest has being, or that motion has being, but not that motion is at rest. It is one business of the philosopher to work out this system of relationships in the abstract realm of the categories, thus providing a framework for the knowledge process, and, incidentally, finding a solution for the logical paradoxes which had played so prominent a part in the philosophy of the past, in particular the philosophy of the Eleatics and of the Heracleiteans.[7]

Meanwhile it is important to observe—though Plato does not himself make this very explicit—that one result of his inquiries has been to suggest divisions in what stood originally for the single indefinite class of Ideas. In the use of this term Plato tends in the later dialogues to become more sparing; and he finds it impossible to manage the complexity of his problem except by dealing with various types of universals more or less independently. Thus the categories, or most general predicates, become, as has just been seen, the subject of a special transcendental logic; and it has even been questioned whether he still continues to think of them as Ideas at all. Another type of concept, that of sensible qualities, would seem on the way to being eliminated altogether by a psychological theory of their "relativity"; while the concepts of natural types—organic species and inorganic substances—come in a special way to

[7] *Ibid.*, 250*sq.*

represent the Idea in the field of science in its narrow sense.

If it were not for Aristole we might even suspect that the fundamental problem of the Idea as such had lost interest for Plato in the multiplicity of more special problems. But Aristotle makes it clear that this was not the case. Plato still held to, and emphasized, a "theory of Ideas." And in order to interpret this we have to turn to still another special class of universals—a particularly typical class. Surely, says Theætetus in the *Sophist,* if anything has a real existence it is Number. It seems impossible to get any consistent understanding of the maturer Plato unless we realize the decisive influence which the Pythagoreans had upon his thinking, and the dominant place of mathematics in his philosophy. This influence may be traced constantly in his later writings; but in any case the testimony of Aristotle is decisive. For Aristotle tells us expressly that in his teaching in the Academy Plato identified the Ideas ultimately with Numbers.[8]

This last doctrine, whose interpretation is dependent on a combination of Aristotle's testimony with scattered hints in the dialogues—where we have Plato's own statement[9] that an explicit account of his metaphysics is not to be looked for—scholars have not found it an easy matter to reinvest with its original significance. One meaning of a general sort it seems pretty obviously to have—a meaning which the modern man will find intelligible enough, and important. Scientific explanation is to be attained, that is, by reducing the indefiniteness and vague complexity of the apparent facts to terms of quantity and measure. Plato does not understand this in a way that would entirely satisfy the modern scientist. The conception of quantitative "laws" lies but vaguely in his mind; when he actually sets out tentatively to apply the method, it is rather to the

[8] *Cf. Metaphysics* A. 9. 991b; M. 8. 1083a.
[9] In the *Seventh Epistle.*

æsthetic qualities of form and number that he turns—their neatness, simplicity, and appropriateness to the canons of an austere beauty.[10] But at least he is certain that the growth of precision and system such as the mathematical categories alone make possible is the goal of true understanding. The element of being or of reality in the changing world, which it is the business of knowledge to grasp, is to be found most adequately embodied in the unchanging mathematical relationships that run through it.

But mathematical objects, as science makes use of them, are for Plato still not ultimate. The concepts of the mathematical science of his day, such as the odd and the even, appear even in the *Republic* as "hypotheses" which need to be grounded in some more absolute principle intuitively self-evident to the reason, as mathematical concepts are not.[11] It is much more difficult to see his meaning in this further demand. But it probably is easiest to interpret in the light of recent developments of a mathematical philosophy. What Plato appears to be aiming at is, in brief, the derivation of arithmetical number from more elementary concepts; in other words, the reduction of mathematics ultimately to logic. And he does this by finding the essence of number—which does not mean the "twos" of mathematical science, but the "twoness" which is absolutely one and indivisible, and which does not arise from the addition of units[12]—in the product of a Limit, or the One and of the Unlimited or Infinite. This last is in a certain sense Not-being; but only in the sense, not that it is "nothing," but that it is not *anything in particular* until it gets some particular or quantitative expression by combining with the Limit. Plato adds to this the further doctrine that the Unlimited does not, as the Pythagoreans held, start from the unit, which itself needs to be logically derived; it includes the infinitely small as well as the infinitely great. To it,

[10] *Cf. Timæus* 33, 44, 54, 90; *Republic* 546; *Laws* 737-8, 771.
[11] *Republic* 510-1,533. [12] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* M. 1083a.

therefore, Plato gives the name of the Indeterminate Dyad, or the Great and Small; and he apparently looks to this conception for a solution of the puzzles about incommensurables which had been forcing themselves on the attention of mathematicians.[13]

6. Reality is to be interpreted, then, as an ideal system which has its logical and principled basis in the imposition of definite limit or measure on an indefinite continuity, and which is represented in the concrete sciences by the mathematical relations that constitute the truth which reason seeks to discover in the world of sense. And if this brief summary be taken as approximately representing Plato's views, it only remains now to come back to the original question, and ask how such a conception lends itself to the needs of ethics.

In general terms we know the answer which Plato gave in the Academy. The Good, according to Aristotle, is to be identified with the One, which combines with the Indeterminate Dyad to generate the ideal numbers; it is the principle and source of *measure,* which, as Plato tells us in the *Philebus,* ranks highest in the list of goods, higher even than beauty, mind, and wisdom. Plato is thus continuing in a sense the Socratic tradition of the good as an eternally real object residing in a supersensible world. But the meaning he intends this to convey is a very different one. The ethical atmosphere which envelops the Socratic good now has given place to a fervor that is primarily metaphysical and speculative; and we are told on the authority of Aristotle that listeners who came to Plato's famous lecture on the Good expecting to learn about good things in their common human meaning went away much perplexed because they heard of nothing but numbers and geometry and astronomy and the One. To suppose, indeed, that the eternal and unchanging realm of logical and mathematical truth should suffer the intrusion of a merely human tele-

[13] For this general interpretation see Burnet, *Greek Philosophy.*

ology would clearly be in Plato's view a desecration. This last belongs unequivocally to the lower world of change and appearance, and is related to absolute truth, not as identical with its essence, but, like all finite things, as dependent on it for such measure of reality as it may embody. No human thing is of serious importance, Socrates once remarks; Plato even leaves it an open question whether man may not be a mere puppet of the gods without any really significant purpose in the rational economy.[14] *The* good is something to which only the dialectician can hope ever to attain; and accordingly the empirical ends with which psychology and politics deal cannot possibly be identified with it. In the allegory of the Cave such human goods appear as no more than unreal shadows. No true knowledge of them is possible until the philosopher has deduced them from the ideal Good—corresponding to the real sun whence arise the shadows in the Cave—which is the generative principle of the hypotheses of mathematics; until such a day comes, all our human talk about the good must evidently be in terms of appearances and approximations simply.[15]

Why, then, should Plato have continued to designate by a name that stands primarily for "value" a reality conceived by him primarily in terms of logical understanding? There is only one plausible explanation. Teleology in the last analysis has to be interpreted in the light, not of "function," but of that aesthetic or semi-aesthetic value which for the man of intellect attaches to rational order as such—an order that finds its most striking expression in the "beautiful" relationships of mathematics. "Everything that is good is fair, and the fair is not without measure." No one can be a true Platonist who does not share to some extent his enthusiasm over the abstract beauties of the perfect circle or the perfect triangle, and find in the contemplation of the pure relationships of number a chief solace of man in his immersion in the troubled life of sense. It is in this absolute

[14] *Republic* 604; *Laws* 644. [15] *Republic* 534.

sphere where the power of the good has retired into the region of the beautiful [16] that we are to look for the good as such—in the eternal logical perfection of "system" and not in the temporal connection of means with ends, since time itself is an appearance. Only in this connection does human teleology find for itself a real significance. The ears and the eyes are for a purpose, but it is not the crude purpose of satisfying natural needs; it is in order that, through perceiving the movements of the heavenly bodies and the harmonies of musical sounds, they thus may introduce the mind to the true objects of its desire.[17]

Plato's problem, then, is to derive the entire world of appearance, including the empirical values that determine human conduct, from these ultimate principles of pure reason. Ideally this ought to mean a mathematical deduction. It is in numbers that explanatory principles take shape; and it is expressly to mathematics that he turns for the education of the philosopher. But if even to-day this is a method impossible of carrying out with anything like completeness, especially in the human sphere, it is even more plainly impossible for Plato, lacking as he does the tools which science has since developed. That mathematical deduction hovers before his mind as a goal appears from scattered hints. But the real influence which the doctrine of Ideas had upon his conclusions in particular only comes in view when we drop out the intermediate realm of "mathematical objects" and turn directly to the logical source from which mathematics is derived. Here we plainly have, in metaphysical language, just the same outcome previously reached as the result of a more direct examination of Plato's doctrine. That product of a limit imposed on the infinite or continuous, which in mathematics takes the form of exact quantitative relationships, in the looser context of man's psychological and social life shows itself as "order." The intrinsic worth of order and the orderly life we may,

[16] *Philebus* 64.

[17] *Timæus* 47; *Republic* 530.

then, once more assume as a guiding principle, and examine with a little more care its consequences.

7. And in terms, first, of psychology. Now order is in itself a very comprehensive word. It may cover empirical facts of a number of different sorts; and Plato does not hesitate to draft for his argument suggestions from any and all of these, so that a determinate account of what he himself means by order is not easy to gather from his pages. But it may at least be defined in terms of what it is *not*. And there is one meaning in particular whose exclusion throws a strong light on Plato's leanings.

Attention has been drawn already to the possibility of interpreting the thesis that the soul's health consists in the orderly relationship of its parts—and the interpretation is one especially congenial to the modern thinker—by taking it to mean that we should look for the good of life in its *completeness,* or in the satisfaction it gives to every side of human nature each in its proper degree. And there is a sense undoubtedly in which Plato would say that the true life is the unified life. But what he intends by this is not the sense that usually it carries. For its more frequent modern meaning, the starting-point is the empirical content of human nature, its propensities and feelings and desires; and the ideal is to gratify each of these as fully as is consistent with the equal rights of all the rest. "Order" in this way gets a fairly definite meaning; it signifies an experienced harmony in the expression of all the natural impulses.

But this is precisely the course that Plato refuses to adopt. Toward a large, indeed an almost overwhelming, part of concrete human nature, he is constantly revealing an attitude of suspicion if not of actual antipathy. He pays almost no attention to the things which the naturalistic thinker relies on to provide a content for the good life—the specific impulses and desires. It is the *class* of desires in which alone he takes an interest; and his chief concern with this is to subordinate it, as a class, to a nobler side of

man. Apart from the one worthy emotion of a philosophic love for abstract truth and beauty, the entire emotional life, in which the humanness of man is rooted, is allowed to remain only on sufferance, when it is permitted to remain at all. It is his chief count against the arts that they occasion undue incitement to the feelings. Especially noteworthy is his disparagement of all forms of art that cater to a catholic interest in the varied play of life and character. This profuseness in the possibilities that lie in human nature, so significant from the standpoint of a more modern and experimental view of man, leaves Plato cold; [18] instead, he would confine art to the standardized delineation of a few ideal types such as meet his own fastidious approval. It is ideal Man, and not the ideal possibilities of particular men, that he sets up as a norm.

For Plato, therefore, life is unified primarily in the sense that its true explanation would show, everywhere running through it, the threads of rational and scientific law. He starts, that is, from the upper and abstract rather than from the empirically verifiable end; and ideal completeness he thinks of not as a harmony of experienced elements, but as a severely intellectual and rational system, in the light of which most of the common and everyday values stand condemned as mere appearance. While in theory he does not aim to set apart the world of experience from the world of being, the whole duty of the empirical world is fulfilled when it offers itself as a subject of scientific explanation; that it should attempt to employ its own content to throw light on the nature of the rational whole, except as this content reveals the traces of eternal reason, would be an impertinence. It is closer to Plato's ordinary usage to say, not that the good life is the complete life, but that it is the realization of the *divine* in man; and the divine is only a part of the soul, though it is the part that is most real and most distinctive.

[18] *Cf. Republic* 557.

It still remains to translate this into terms of actual conduct; what is the *practical* effect it will have on human motives? And here we come upon a difficulty that complicates any exposition of Plato's thought. There are two distinguishable ideals of living set forth in the dialogues—what we might call, respectively, the life of reason, and the rational life. Along, that is to say, with the actual life of ethical conduct which man lives as a member of human society, and which is to be turned into noble but logically rather obscure channels through its connection with cosmic reason, there is also to be recognized the more exclusive claim of the intellectual life as such, where reason, as the ruling part of man, is engaged in the contemplation of absolute and timeless truth.

Socrates had been able to escape a serious diremption here between thought and morals, because for him knowledge is that mystic contemplation of the good which may be conceived as molding conduct into its own likeness directly by its sheer attractiveness and beauty. In turning knowledge into intellect, Plato loses this advantage. It still remains true that for him also, in another way, his view of knowledge has a significance for moral conduct. If the good lies in an approximation to the ideal of man, which, again, derives its value from the place it holds in the orderly system of the world, it is to philosophy that the work belongs of determining alike this universal type and the particular function it performs, to which man's individual good is due. Nevertheless the true philosopher is no pragmatist, with eyes fixed wholly on the human. He ranges with disinterested curiosity the whole realm of being, eager for truth wherever it is found. And therefore it is inevitable that the intellectual life should tend to disengage itself from moral conduct and claim a gratification on its own account. Moreover, why should it not be a natural conclusion, if reason is the highest part of man, that only in the rational perception of order does man really find him-

self? May not the one activity that fulfils the type be the satisfaction of the intellect? Certainly *without* this no such fulfilment will take place; and it might well be conceivable that it is, not the highest merely, but the *only* form of human good.

There cannot be much doubt that to this conclusion Plato is tempted strongly. The lower sides of man, involved in everyday moral conduct, arouse in him little warmth of interest, and his mind is constantly turning from it to the life of thought. But an obstacle always interposes. In its immediate form this is the fact that goodness does have its empirical connection with conduct also, and not with mind alone; and the scientist cannot ignore his data. But also it is possible to see that there is a logical claim upon him as well. For if reason judges that to be good which fulfils the human type, these concrete relationships involved in conduct will enter into the rational order which the reason perceives; and as objects of reason they cannot, therefore, be absorbed into the activity of reason. Reason has a subject matter other than itself; and in so far as this takes the form of human conduct, it must remain as an element in the good life underlying the exercise of the intellect. Accordingly moral conduct and rational contemplation continue to be forms of the ideal distinguishable in practice, with now one and now the other uppermost.

The reason for the touch of uncertainty in Plato's treatment will perhaps be a little plainer if we put the matter in a different way. The facts which as a scientist he sets out to explain are, to begin with, the facts of everyday conduct, the virtues and ideals of ordinary human nature. But now the attitude of the philosopher himself, who finds his satisfaction in rational explanation, is also an empirical fact; and his value judgment is itself one of the things that science ought to explain. But like many another philosopher since his day, Plato is not prepared for this admission. The presuppositions which govern his own attitude lie too much in

the background, and take on too peculiar a significance, to make it seem natural to deal with them in quite the same impartial way that he is ready to deal with other things. And the consequence is a divided mind. His scientific interest takes the form of a spontaneous and uncriticized assumption that the one value which fully justifies itself is the value he himself most strongly feels—the value of absolute truth and reason, and of a life devoted to its quest. As a scientist he cannot really commit himself to the repudiation of the senses which such an ideal involves. Nevertheless it is constantly leading him to assign to the intellect a place in the content of the good life which to men of a different temperament will seem excessive.

8. To these general deductions from Plato's metaphysics we fortunately are in a position to give a more specific form. The *Philebus* is certainly one of Plato's latest writings; and in the *Philebus* an interesting attempt is made to apply scientific method to an understanding of the good for man. The dialogue is made up of a number of psychological, logical, and metaphysical discussions not very closely welded together, and by no means all pointing to a single unequivocal issue. But it indicates with sufficient clearness the direction Plato conceived a scientific ethics ought to take.

The general plot of the *Philebus* has to do with the relative claims of pleasure, and of thought or wisdom, to be called the good. It quickly becomes apparent that Plato has no intention of trying to answer this question by appealing to any experimental sense of human satisfaction. The nature of the argument comes out most clearly in the case of pleasure. Pleasure cannot be the good, because pleasure, as feeling, is a continuum, an indefinite more or less of quality, without the quantitative determinations that lend themselves to exact knowledge; and Plato, in common with the Greek mind generally, takes for granted that goodness is to be looked for not in the infinite, but in the limited,

precise, determinate. Pleasure can be brought within the confines of the good only in so far as its infiniteness or continuity as feeling receives the impress of limit or measure—combines, that is, with the "finite" in the shape of mathematical relationships. From this admixture come the seasons and every good there is in the world—beauty, and health, and strength, and the many beauties and high perfections of the soul.[19] The same general conclusion follows equally from the psychology of pleasure to which Plato apparently inclines. According to this theory, which has a more detailed exposition in the *Timæus,* pleasure arises when there is a return—a relatively sudden rather than a gradual return—to equilibrium or harmony in the organism after the order of nature has been disturbed; pain accompanies a similar abrupt departure from equilibrium. But since for Plato it is always in attained harmony, and not in the process of attaining it, that good consists, pleasure must be considered as having no essential connection with the true desirableness of life; pure philosophic reason in man is probably, and the life of the blessed gods is most certainly, to be thought of as neither pleasurable nor painful, but as neutral.[20]

Neither are we justified in taking knowledge by itself as the good. The reason for this second judgment Plato makes considerably less clear. Even in the *Philebus* he is ready to insist on the vast superiority of the life of pure or philosophic thought to every other; and in that case why should not philosophy be enough for us, without dilution from inferior joys?[21] However, Plato is not concerned now with an unattainable ideal, but with the actual science of human nature; and the scientist must take man as he finds him. It is ridiculous, in a creature such as man, to stop with the knowledge that is superhuman.[22] But while Plato, therefore, pronounces in favor of the mixed life that includes

[19] *Philebus* 24-27.
[20] *Ibid.,* 22, 31, 55; *Timæus* 64-5.
[21] *Cf. Philebus* 22.
[22] *Cf. Philibus* 62-3.

both thought and pleasure, it also follows that in such a mixture thought has indubitably at least the higher place. For if anything is good in proportion to the presence of measure in it, it is obvious that mind and thought, whose essence it is to deal with exact relationships, must be much more closely akin than pleasure is to the divine mind which is the cause of order and measure in the cosmos.

It is the task of the philosophic scientist, then, not merely to single out one form of good as highest, but to distinguish all true claimants to the title, rank them in their order of merit, and make out of these various ingredients the fairest of all possible mixtures. And assuming that the highest rank will belong to measure, and to the symmetry, beauty, and perfection of the ideal type in which measure gets expression, it will be his particular business to estimate the various grades of human knowledge and of pleasure that have a right to enter into the loveliest mixture. The standards which Plato uses here—purity, fairness, reality—leave much to be desired from the standpoint of logical rigor; but their meaning in the context is for the most part fairly clear. In the case of knowledge, it is "reality" of which he chiefly speaks. That knowledge will clearly be most real which has to do with the most real objects—which means that it will be valuable in proportion to the presence of number in it.[23] And while, consequently, Plato finds a place in the content of the good life for the less exact forms of mind as shown in science, art, and even true opinion, these will necessarily rank below mind and wisdom in their true acceptation—the dialectical knowledge of the philosopher. Plato also speaks occasionally of one form of thought as "purer" than another, by which he seems to mean that it is closer to the type of what real knowledge ought to be.[24]

When we turn to pleasure, it is purity rather than reality that now is used chiefly as a standard, though desirable

[23] *Ibid.*, 55*sq*; *cf. Republic* 585.

[24] *Philibus* 57.

pleasures still appear as also the more real. But purity has here another and simpler meaning. Mostly it means freedom from attendant pain. That intellectual pleasures are in this sense the purest goes almost without saying. But there are other pleasures also that Plato does not reject. Certain of the senses—sight, hearing, and on a lower level smell—have pleasures which, owing to the gradual nature of the process by which harmony is restored, are attended by no consciousness of want or pain, and therefore are relatively pure; here belong, in particular, the æsthetic pleasures of line, color, and harmony.[25] And in addition there are the "necessary" pleasures of which Plato has already spoken in the *Republic*—the natural pleasures of biological desire when these are kept within the bounds of health and temperance. All these may be called "true" pleasures; and as such they have a place in the good life.

Meanwhile there remain false pleasures, also, which belong unequivocally to the world of mere generation, and from which the element of measure is lacking; and these of course will be excluded from the mixture. Some of them are false in the sense that they are contaminated by their connection with false opinion, or by a wrong perspective.[26] Others are totally unreal and stand for nothing but escape from pain; they are states colored by contrast with the discomfort that precedes them, but in themselves devoid of feeling tone.[27] Here belong in particular the pleasures of excess, which seem to be the most intense of all, but whose intensity is really dependent on an exaggeration of desire and so of antecedent pain. None of these pleasures have true being, and they are not, therefore, to be reckoned in the class of the good.

In connection with this somewhat obscure and complicated treatment it is only necessary to notice in conclusion the point of chief theoretical importance. Although pleasures are allowed to mingle in the content of the good life,

[25] *Philebus* 51-3. [26] *Ibid.*, 37-8, 42. [27] *Cf. Republic* 583*sq.*

it is not their quality of pleasurableness that gives to them this right. Pleasures are "good" not because they are pleasant, but for a higher reason—the presence in them of the measure which alone gives value. The good is such wholly through its own nature, and irrespective of any pleasure to which it may give rise; just as a beautiful object is not beautiful because we are pleased with it, but we are pleased with it because it is beautiful. And therefore the presence of pleasure, though it may make the good more acceptable to mortal mind, does not in any sense make it "better"; and it can without compunction be omitted altogether from the content of the life that is best and most divine. The principles which Plato uses as a standard are something quite different from pleasantness. "Purity" is an intrinsic rather than a utilitarian ground of preference. It is not because of our natural dislike for pain that pure pleasures appeal to us, but because purity is itself an æsthetic quality and so a good; pleasure that runs true to type is better than pleasure obscured by a combination with its opposite, in the same way that a little pure white is fairer and truer than a great deal that is mixed.[28] And equally of necessary pleasures; the reason for their acceptance which Plato gives in the *Republic* presumably continues to be his true opinion. It is only for the sake of the rational life that we need to consider them. We should indulge natural desires just enough to lay them to sleep, and prevent them, and their enjoyments and pains, from interfering with the higher principle of thought; by calling them necessary, the philosopher means that if it were not for their necessity he would have no interest in them.[29]

9. There still remains to be examined the second and in a way the more important side of Plato's ethical interest. It is not the ethics of the individual—with which the *Philebus* is concerned—that really looms the largest. First and foremost, man is a social and political being. And in this

[28] *Philebus* 53.

[29] *Republic* 558-9, 571-2, 581.

new field of political science, the attempt at an *a priori* derivation of ideals has consequences that are both more easily perceived and more decisive. Plato is the most influential representative of a conception of the state which has had an enormous effect upon the human mind. And the underlying principles that determine this conception have a very close connection with his metaphysics.

There are some advantages—at least in this way we are less likely to be overawed by the authority of Plato's name—in starting an account of such a political ideal from a form in which it is familiar at the present day. The test of good government, we are often told, is its ability to preserve public order. To this end change of any sort is deprecated, as liable to upset human nature and put it in the way of greater and more fatal changes. Stable law and custom ought to be for the mass of men everywhere the guide of life; and to direct custom into right lines is the special work of practical statesmanship. From the start the education of the child should be regulated consciously by the state, by methods carefully devised to inculcate patriotism and unquestioning obedience to the best models; all temptations to originality are to be removed, and independence of judgment, whether in pupils or in teachers, subordinated to official standards. As soon as possible a child's capacity is to be determined by psychological experts, and his place in society settled for him; indeed, the selective process should precede his birth, and mating and procreation be publicly controlled under the guidance of eugenic principles.

The same benevolent control, over opinions as well as actions, is to be continued throughout the lifetime of the citizen, by a judicious system of censorship and propaganda. That he may not be tempted to set up his own weak powers of mind against the wisdom of his superiors, he is to be fed with noble lies which will lead him to acquiesce in what is for his good and the good of the community. Protection is to be afforded even against the disturbing influences of

art. The state is to establish standards of literature and the drama in terms of social utility; and as in an official laureateship, a combination of soundness with mediocrity is to take precedence over genius with its incalculable products. Provincialism is to be encouraged as a moral duty, since too intimate or sympathetic an acquaintance with competing social norms is apt to raise disturbing questions about the authority of one's own; aliens are natural subjects of suspicion, though they may be permitted to perform such necessary services as we do not care to undertake ourselves. Politically the nation should be ruled by a small and close corporation of the best minds, since inferior wisdom ought never to be in a position to dictate to superiority; and new accessions to the governing ranks should come from those who, having received an orthodox education, have shown themselves ready to accept without demur the *status quo*. In general, obedience should be lauded as the highest virtue of the citizen; the younger generation should bow to the conservatism of age, and not presume to set up its own crude wishes and opinions against the riper wisdom of its fathers and forefathers; and no one of whatever standing should attempt to be wiser than the Constitution, or to pass judgment on that "sacred and golden cord of reason called by us the common law of the state." Finally, religion should be used to enforce conservatism, and a fear of the divine vengeance thus be added to the political checks on conduct.

By a political philosopher of such a type, Plato might well be proclaimed as master;[30] though the comparison would of course do injustice to the intellectual distinction that characterizes Plato's thought. It is particularly worth remembering the advantage that derives to Plato through his being able to adopt for himself precisely the opposite practice from the one he recommends in theory. In its

[30] *Cf. Republic* 389, 459; *Laws* 660*sq.*, 701 773, 809, 811, 822-3, 908-9; *Statesman* 310.

commoner forms an authoritarian political philosophy takes for granted in a general way existing institutions, whereas in Plato's case it calls for the creation of a new type of state; and he could never have been the prophet of the ideal Republic had it not been for a very large infusion of the radicalism which, if he had himself lived in the Republic, would have been proscribed. It is his theory, however, that is here in question; and for theory, the summary just given may be taken as not essentially unjust to Plato's meaning.

The first point to notice here is that Plato repudiates decisively the individualism to which the Sophistic movement was beginning to lend philosophical sanction, and looks to the state, or the community as a whole, for the standard by which the good for man is in practice to be measured. Naturally he does not intend to say that the good of the individual and the good of the whole are incompatible. Undoubtedly he thinks that man finds his own good only in the state; the social emphasis is meant to stand contrasted with merely selfish good, competitive or self-indulgent. Nevertheless in attaining the good of the whole, it becomes a matter of indifference what violence is done to natural human desires; and it is not strange that to some of Socrates' hearers it appears questionable whether the good life is really being promoted after all. Certainly Plato has scant feeling for any ultimate significance attaching to the individual man; man has a value in so far as he comes into contact with or expresses the universal principles of reason, but aside from this he is quite unimportant. Personal relationships as such have in them almost nothing to attract the attention of the wise man; the more philosophy one has, for example, the more it will enable him to view calmly the misfortunes of his closest friends, since the illusoriness of mere persons will grow more clear to him.

And it is not merely in connection with the forms of life to which he fails to extend his own approval that Plato dis-

plays an indifference to the fate of individuals as compared with the community. Not only is existence for the great majority of citizens arranged in a way to ignore completely its higher possibilities, but even the most favored class is compelled to an extent to turn aside from the true goal in order to fulfil its social function. For in proportion as the theoretic life is higher than the practical life will the need of going down into the Cave to help his fellows be at the expense of the philosopher's own best happiness and development. The good of the citizen is not that he should cultivate his powers fully, but that he should perform rightly his necessary function in a larger whole; and for this specialization rather than individual self-completeness is required. Each man should do only that for which he is best fitted, at whatever cost to other capacities in him that have to be neglected.

To allow, accordingly, that Plato has no real intention of separating the individual and the common good will not prevent its being true that his philosophy leads him in practice to subordinate sharply, and at times disastrously, the private man to the organization of the state. Everybody might agree that in some sense the good of the community should prevail; but what *is* this good apart from the good of its various members? If we refuse, with Plato, to set out from the concrete and familiar, and to define the good in terms of what personal experience reveals to us as the good of each, where do the possibilities lie of giving actual direction and content to a philosophy of the state?

The answer is identical with the one already given to a similar question about the individual. The highest good to which the state is to subordinate even the philosophers among its citizens is almost invariably described by Plato in terms of order. Organization, system, as itself a value, is the primary test of what constitutes the ideal state. "Efficiency" is perhaps the nearest modern equivalent. The social value of an ideal of efficiency may be, of course, enor-

mous. That men should be assured the particular place in society for which their talents fit them, it is easy to justify in the abstract against much that has vitiated political practice—the spoils system, for example, to take a familiar illustration. At the same time when efficiency refuses to subordinate itself unreservedly to a more ultimate good in terms of human welfare, and instead presents itself as a goal to be aimed at on its own account, its value quickly tends to disappear, and it becomes notably sterile and inhuman.

To such a criticism Plato plainly lays himself open. No doubt he presupposes that a scientific knowledge of the principles of order will lead to the creation of institutions lending themselves to positive human happiness as well, so long as men will be satisfied to be happy in a scientific way. But the setting forth of such a positive content he leaves almost untouched. For practical purposes, the construction of the ideal state is guided by principles which have in view not individual welfare, but the demands of rational system in the abstract. Citizens are to be safeguarded against all temptation to place private pleasure or ambition ahead of the claims of public order. Precautions are to be taken against any change in institutions once established. And, in particular, authority is to be secured to those in whom Plato thinks it ought to be placed, under conditions that shall leave their authority undisputed and unhampered.

This last ideal of authoritarianism—the authority of science and the scientists—is the most striking aspect of Plato's political gospel. If there be an essential order in the nature of things which can be grasped only by the man in whom pure reason has performed its perfect work, it must be the goal of statesmanship to see to it that such men are absolute rulers in the state with power to impress upon its workings their superior wisdom, in the form not primarily of practical insight and good sense, but of a knowledge *a priori* and deductive. Nothing is more significant in Plato's political speculations than his repudiation of the

whole experimental method in politics—the process, open even to a mediocre intelligence, of learning wisdom through a first-hand experience of the unhappy results of heedlessness, ignorance, and folly. Just as he would get rid of variety in human nature in the interest of standardized types that fall more readily into an ordered pattern, so his ideal of political change, if change is necessary, is that it should come about not through the groping method of trial and error, with its attendant uncertainties and confusion, but through a process of abstract reasoning which turns from experienced consequences to the Idea of the Good, as this constitutes the goal of the dialectician. And accordingly it follows strictly that an aristocracy of intellect is the only really defensible form that government can take.

10. Of some of the practical difficulties in the way of his ideal Plato was himself aware. Once assume the state already in existence, especially if time has been allowed to bring the force of education to bear upon at least one generation, and Plato is apparently prepared to take a chance on its continuance, provided sufficient intelligence and ingenuity are shown in devising safeguards against change. It is arguable that he is overcredulous in this assumption, and that he shows an excessive confidence in the power of training to eliminate the native instincts. But whatever the probabilities here may be, in any case the ideal state has first to get a start; and this is a problem which evidently troubled him. Since he is unwilling to contemplate the chance that the citizens themselves may perhaps grow canny enough to select their own rulers wisely, he is left with the rather cold comfort of looking forward to the possible appearance, somewhere and at some time, of an existing ruler who is a philosopher as well.

And there is a further consideration which equally suggests a doubt about Plato's political realism—his romantically high estimate of the superior man. Being himself a

university professor, he should have been aware how very rare a thing a perfect sage must always be. Ideally reason ought no doubt to place the philosopher above many of the temptations that assail mankind; it should make him disinterested in his judgments, free from petty jealousies and ambitions, able to see things in their true perspective and so to escape irrational desire.[31] And a genuine love of truth does in fact encourage a rather wide range of virtues. But to depend upon this ideal tendency without also recognizing its many limitations is to be idealistic in the undesirable sense. It is one of the dangerous blind spots in Plato's vision that he minimizes the risks attaching to the fallibility of even the most capable of human minds when assigned the task of "amending their fellow citizens." Not only are the limitations of insight and of sympathy notorious, even where there may be a gift for the higher mathematics, but, as Plato himself points out much too incidentally,[36] the mere possession of unchecked power constitutes a temptation which human nature is seldom able to resist successfully.

It perhaps is worth noting that Plato makes it easier for himself to overlook some of the difficulties here by one particular turn which his ideal takes. The modern man thinks in terms of an enormously complicated society; and while this makes the need greater for scientific statesmanship, it also limits the service that pure science can be expected to perform, and increases the need for experimental groping as against the vision of some perfect goal. The contrivers of ideal states, therefore, have almost always had to look backward and reverse the growing complexity of life by returning to a relatively simple, natural, and uncomplicated existence. Usually their chief appeal arises just from this, that they conceive of social life as capable of recovering that clearness and simplicity of outline which

[31] *Republic* 485*sq.*, 500.

[36] *Laws* 691, 713.

the eye misses in the irrational and chaotic present. It is of course to this semi-æsthetic, semi-ethical motive—the love of simplicity and order and the "safe and harmonious life," and a dislike for profusion and variety in human nature, and for clumsy experiment—that the peculiar nature of Plato's ideal is due, rather than to a practical need to make it workable. But it does serve this latter purpose also; for when both human nature and social institutions are reduced to their simplest terms, not only does the need for change become less importunate, but if change *is* required, it may be expected to come about naturally and gradually, and without upsetting the routine of life. Only it now is bound, in practice, to become a question which form of ideal is most likely to emerge on top in the conflict between æsthetic simplicity backed by philosophic reason, and the urge of natural forces which are all the time adding to the complexity of existence. And the course of events since Plato's day has certainly not been of a nature to increase the historical chances of his own preference.

11. The preceding remarks have doubtless done less than justice to the power and persuasiveness of Plato's thought, and to the elements of value which he contributes to an understanding of the ethical life. It is unlikely the time will ever come when it will be irrelevant to call man's thoughts away from the pettiness of his daily life and merely private interests, and turn them to the larger context by which alone these are saved from insignificance—to the need that he fill his place disinterestedly and worthily in the objective order, that he rule his life by settled principle rather than haphazard inclination, that he recognize the value of an ideal of perfection to supplement and correct his natural readiness to be satisfied with small accomplishments. But "idealism" has always had this practical disadvantage, that its lavish employment of eulogistic terms—reason, the good, perfection—is apt to carry an emotional appeal which makes it seem unnecessary to specify too

accurately just what is their human meaning. And there has been a strong temptation for his admirers to import into Plato's words any content that may have gathered about such terms during the progress of the spiritual life since his own day, without much regard to the limitations of his personal standpoint. In particular, it is apt to be forgotten that his ethics must be judged by the values it does *not* accept as well as by those it does. And if, as has appeared probable, perfection and totality are defined by him at the expense of nearer and homelier forms of good, it is essential not to overlook this in making a final estimate.

What general impression Plato's philosophy is to leave is bound in the end to be determined by one's judgment on the validity of this peculiar emphasis. If one prizes above all things a pervasive intellectual distinction, an aristocratic fastidiousness in things of the mind, a high seriousness which looks down upon the common, he is likely always to turn to Plato as the representative of what is best in the spiritual life. And such things have their strong appeal. But while they may be the essence of the humane, they are not quite human in the larger sense. And if one will lay aside the traditional piety toward Plato and examine him with an unbiased eye, it will not be difficult to detect qualities of the ideal that need after all some justifying. It is quite possible to feel, for example, that the exclusion of laughter and simple amusement from the noble life lends itself to pomposity rather than true dignity; that the disposition to look upon strong feeling as base, and its expression as unmanly, has an undesirable tendency to dry up the source from which values spring; that the insistence on applying the standards of our sterner moods to every act and moment of our lives—Plato would have it, for example, inconsistent with the dignity of the philosopher to go afishing—is to overlook gradations of worth that are essential to a sane outlook; and that, in particular, such an unrelaxed severity of judgment is almost sure to induce in the philosopher an

estimate of his own pretensions which will lead to a dangerous self-deception, and which will introduce into his estimates of common men that lack of sympathy and of fundamental understanding which is the least pleasant side of Plato to the ordinary reader.

CHAPTER III

GREEK ETHICS (*continued*)

ARISTOTLE

1. ARISTOTLE's treatise on ethics is possibly the most influential book ever written on the subject, though one would hesitate to call it the greatest book. To an extent its vogue has been due to reasons more or less accidental. It had, to begin with, the advantage of being the first systematic attempt on a large scale to deal with ethics as a separate undertaking, disentangled from the related matters which, in the *Republic,* are almost coextensive with the range of philosophic thought. It may be a question whether ethics does not suffer some loss by being narrowed in this way. Still philosophy cannot get along without specialization and system. And while Aristotle had not the striking success here in creating a new science that he met with in his treatises on logic, his attempt is on the whole extremely creditable; and the lovers of system, who include most philosophers, have continued to turn to him with avidity. To this there is to be added Aristotle's good fortune in becoming the chief intellectual nourishment of Europe after the eclipse of speculation and of letters, and in securing, in consequence, a hold on the curriculum of the universities which to some extent continues to the present day, and which naturally has predisposed the world of scholarship to discover in him at least all the virtues that he possesses.

The difference between Aristotle and Plato shows most fundamentally in a new attitude toward the method of empiricism. There is no longer any attempt to deduce the virtues from the abstract concept of the good; indeed

Aristotle argues expressly, against Plato, that the good as such has no place in a scientific ethics, which concerns itself only with the good for man.[1] And to find out what this latter good consists in, we must look primarily to the facts rather than to metaphysics. The good is what men actually accept as the end of conduct, and not something the philosopher tries to impose upon them.

And since human ends are in real life partial and confused and inconsistent, ethics must accept, too, an aspect of contingency, and forego the desire to systematize and rationalize unduly. In ethics we are not to expect necessary principles that apply universally.[2] What a man is called upon to do will depend upon the circumstances, the constitution of the society in which he lives, and his own personal character; to adjust action to all these contingencies requires practical good sense and insight rather than scientific deduction. Consequently a good share of Aristotle's treatise is concerned with a detailed analysis of the good and bad qualities with which men are commonly credited in popular opinion; with the attempt to establish a scientific terminology by drawing careful distinctions between terms apt to be confused; and with resolving, in the light of this more careful analysis, ethical problems and paradoxes which have been a matter of debate among educated men. All this adds appreciably to the human interest of his discussions and is of great value for our knowledge of the standards that governed the attitude of the Greek mind in Aristotle's day toward moral values. But for the present purpose it will be more useful to ignore such details and attend simply to the larger points of theory.

2. In general terms Aristotle, like Plato, takes as a starting-point for his account of human good the notion of end or function.[3] Every being has its end in a sort of activity which nature intended for it, and which constitutes its excellence or virtue. This is not the same for every-

[1] *Nichomachean Ethics* I. 4. [2] II. 2. [3] I. 6.

thing. It differs in a man and, say, a horse or dog; and in a lesser degree it differs in a man and a woman, or in a freeman and a slave. But taking man generically, we may say that he has a function which constitutes his proper nature as a man, and thus his good. So far Aristotle would seem to be repeating very much what Plato had said before him. But the details of his theory, and the line of argument by which they are reached, are Aristotle's own, and are far enough apart from Plato's treatment to stand for a distinguishable type of ethics.

The difference here involves a general difference of metaphysical outlook which is connected closely with the changed character of Aristotle's scientific interest—an interest in biology rather than in mathematics. The result had been a new way of understanding that relation between the particular fact and the Form which had puzzled Plato. Taking his cue from the life of animals and of man, the "real" becomes, for Aristotle, not an unchanging world of fundamental rational principles, but a world of concrete beings which pass through a series of connected changes from a lesser to a completer realization of their essential natures. To understand this concrete process it is necessary to take account both of the successive stages that enter into it, and of the general type or idea that rules it, and makes it one form of process rather than another. Matter in this way comes to be defined by Aristotle as the possibility, and form as the actuality, of such a concrete realization. It is true that Plato also had proposed to bring the notion of process or of motion within his concept of real being. But his persistence in thinking of the essence of reality in terms of mathematical and logical relationships had put an insuperable obstacle in the way of making this very intelligible. For Aristotle, on the other hand, with his biological turn of mind, the notion of development has, up to a point at least, a simple and straightforward meaning. And accordingly when he comes to work out the notion of the good as

the form of life proper to man, he is able to give it a degree of speculative consistency, and a significance for practice, which Plato had not found possible. This interpretation of the good in terms of human *activity*—of living as itself the end of life—constitutes his central contribution to the theory of ethics; and to it ethical thought has constantly shown a tendency to return after experimenting with rival notions.

Aristotle begins with the assumption that the highest good of man is most adequately expressed in the term happiness or well-being (eudæmonia). That this judgment is not open to strict demonstration is nothing against it. Ethics is a field in which scientific certainty is not to be had in any case; and the fact that men in general do actually pass such a judgment is all the proof we have a right to demand. The task of the philosopher is to determine more accurately in what the nature of this happiness consists.

Aristotle's own analysis is an attempt, and on the whole a very successful attempt, to do justice to several competing motives whose separation has been the cause of a good proportion of the quarrels among ethical philosophers. To begin with one particularly controversial matter, he is not afraid to use the word pleasure in defining happiness. Even the bodily pleasures are not to be excluded from the content of the good and happy life; a man has a right to enjoy things that are pleasant so long as they are not prejudicial to health, or inconsistent with noble content, or extravagant beyond his means. The virtuous and noble life must itself be possessed of a quality for which pleasure is the only proper designation, if it is to be accepted by human beings as desirable; certainly no one would endure the good itself continuously if it were painful to him.[4] There is no more important element, indeed, in the formation of a virtuous character, than a rightly directed sense of pleasure and dislike.[5] On the other hand Aristotle allows the justice of the Platonic claim that happiness *is* not pleasure. The highest

[4] VIII. 7. [5] X. 1.

good must be a good that is final, supremely desirable above all other things, self-sufficient, and leaving us in need of nothing; and to this description pleasure does not answer.

The way in which the two judgments are to be adjusted is indicated by the psychology of "function." Pleasure is to be regarded not as something ultimate, standing on its own bottom, but as dependent on the "activity" which the scientific biologist accepts as the true description of human life. Here we have an important departure from Plato's psychology of pleasure. Plato had attached the feeling of pleasure to the process of recovery from maladjustment. It arises when the body is getting back to a condition of stable equilibrium or harmony; and such a theory had helped to reënforce his instinctive prejudice against recognizing the significance of feeling in experience. Aristotle rejected this psychology, and instead of connecting pleasure with the process of restoring a broken harmony, he takes it as an accompaniment of this very harmony itself.[6] It is the sign not of coming to be, but of being—of the unimpeded exercise of the powers that constitute man's nature. In its essence, accordingly, it is not connected with desire, pain, or excessive functioning; the facts that indicate such a connection Aristotle accounts for by the ingenious suggestion that the impure or imperfect pleasures which apparently need the presence of want or painful desire are in reality produced, not by the process of satisfying the want, but by the fully realized activities of other parts of our nature that accompany the restoration process. And whereas for Plato, therefore, in the highest life of intellect pleasure ought to have no place, so that our right to speak of happiness or blessedness in connection with divine men or with the gods is dubious, Aristotle is able to maintain that pleasure has its true connection with attainment rather than with struggle, and that, in consequence, man's highest attainment is identical with his truest pleasure.

[6] VII. 13.

Just what this relation is between pleasure and activity Aristotle does not make altogether plain. Most specifically, it is described as a "superadded perfection";[7] though it is also said to help increase the activity, and to supply a test of its perfection. For practical purposes, it is enough to say that the two things are inseparably connected, so that happiness implies them both. Meanwhile it is the more objective term that is chiefly useful in formulating the standard which ethics demands for its purposes; and accordingly we can afford to take feeling for granted, and consider the end primarily in terms of activity. The good is not any and every pleasure, but the fullest possible realization of human function in an activity which is pleasurable or satisfying.

Now a condition of soul which is conducive to the exercise of human function as nature intended it constitutes man's excellence or virtue. But even virtue, it should be noticed, is not entirely equivalent to happiness.[8] Happiness is not a moral *state;* if it were, it would be predicable of one who spends his whole life in sleep, or of one who is utterly miserable.[9] Virtue as a good condition of the soul which enables it to perform its function well is an indispensable condition of happiness; but happiness itself exists only in exercise. Accordingly the good of man may be defined, again, as an activity of soul which is *in accordance with* virtue, or, if there are more virtues than one, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue.[10]

In identifying happiness with virtue in action rather than with the mere possession of virtue, we are led now to one further addition. If the end of life were the attainment of character alone, the mere consciousness of his own virtue might be enough to make a man happy without the addition of external goods. But if the true end lies not in possession but in use, a certain measure of external advantages—health, beauty, money, luck—is needed to provide the con-

[7] X. 4, 5.
[8] I. 3.
[9] X. 6.
[10] I. 6.

ditions for the life of unimpeded and satisfying activity—enough for the performance of good actions, but not too large a measure, since an excess of worldly goods is apt to prove a hindrance rather than a help to virtuous living.[11]

3. Meanwhile what, more precisely, is a virtue? To understand Aristotle's doctrine here it is necessary to go back to his psychology. Along with the passive feelings of pleasure and pain, the analysis of human conduct on which he erects his ethical program involves two main ingredients. The original source of conduct is to be found in desires and feelings, which alone in a strict interpretation move to action, and whose nature it is to seek to attain pleasure and avoid pain. The other constituent is reason. Reason is not in itself an active principle of movement, and Aristotle has some trouble in making clear just what part it plays as a psychological force.[12] It is self-evident, however, that nothing deserves to be called a *virtue* unless it involves in the first place rational choice. In the strict sense there is no such thing as a purely natural and spontaneous virtue.[13] There are natural feelings which point in the direction of the virtues, and furnish the most fertile soil for the cultivation of the ethical life. But natural hardihood is not the same thing as courage in the moral sense; true courage exists only when dangers are faced knowingly and deliberately for the sake of some worthy end. The difference here is indicated in the difference of attitude we adopt toward such natural gifts of temperament as compared with virtues proper. We may admire such gifts, but we do not praise them;[14] and it is for Aristotle one of the empirical differentia of a virtue that it is an object of praise.

It is still not enough, however, in order to possess a virtue, that we should make a rational choice. Such a choice might be a desultory one, whereas a virtue must possess a quality of permanence and necessity such as leads not to

[11] I. 9.
[12] VI. 2; *cf.* VI. 13.
[13] II. 1.
[14] II. 4.

one act or a few, but to a particular *kind* of action, which it guarantees regularly in the future. In other words, it depends on *character;* and character is something more than an act of rational desire. It is a *habit* of rational desire. To produce a virtue we must not only use our reason, but we must act repeatedly in the way that reason directs until this sort of action becomes a second nature. The good or moral man is thus the man who, by following consistently the dictates of reason, has shaped his own character so that now he does the right thing spontaneously and by immediate preference.

And now to return to pleasure for a moment. The virtuous man, as has appeared, will aim at pleasure also; indeed, with anything like an even break his will be the pleasantest life. But he is not a pleasure-seeker in the promiscuous and ignoble sense, because it is only worthy pleasures which with his tempered character he will find pleasant. In fact, the good man's character will itself constitute the standard by which pleasures are to be judged. That pleasure is a good one which the good man would choose; a just deed is what a just man would do. When people are in a good state of health, it is the things that are truly wholesome that will seem wholesome to them. And in the same way moral health is the condition which determines whether a man's wishes will coincide with what really, and not in appearance only, constitutes his happiness.[15]

4. But at this point a question is likely to suggest itself. It might appear that Aristotle has fallen into something like a vicious circle. In order that we may have a virtue, desire must be subjected to the rule of reason. But if the ends which reason has to work toward presuppose for their perception the virtues already fully formed, the good man with his character complete, we seem to be left rather in

[15] X. 5; III. 6.

the air. Some further explanation of the standard which reason uses to adjust desires to the needs of life is called for.

At first sight it might seem that Aristotle has an answer for the question in the most widely exploited feature of his ethical theory—the doctrine that virtue is always a *mean* between two extremes. This conception of the mean has its origin in obvious facts of human experience. In the case of health, for instance, harm may be done by the use of too much exercise or too little, by too much food or not enough; the good trainer will aim at just the happy medium. And into the formula which this suggests, some at least of the commonly accepted virtues will readily fall. Thus courage may be said to be a mean between cowardice and foolhardiness, liberality between stinginess and prodigality, magnificence between meanness and vulgarity, modesty between shamelessness and bashfulness, and the like.

For one who is interested in theory, however, the importance traditionally assigned to the doctrine of virtue as a mean can hardly avoid appearing much exaggerated. Even as a general formula it is doubtful how far it will apply. If a virtue could always be reduced to the effectiveness with which some special impulse plays its part in the economy of the organism, it might seem possible to describe its deviations from a standard in terms of deficiency or excess. But there are numerous cases where such a description will seem forced and artificial. It is going out of one's way, for example, to define truthfulness as a mean between uttering too much and uttering too little; to make his point Aristotle has to limit the meaning of the virtue by calling boastfulness and self-depreciation the extremes. Particularly in the case of the two virtues to which he pays the most attention—justice and friendship—is the breakdown of the formula manifest. Friendliness is, indeed, in the first instance, called a mean between obsequiousness and

moroseness.[16] But in his detailed treatment of friendship this is lost sight of. In fact Aristotle has to confess that friendship is only a "sort of a virtue," and that perfect friendship, or love, is itself in some sense an excess.[17]

But even if the definition of virtue as a mean were more universally applicable than it seems to be, it still would not meet the practical demand which is involved in calling it a standard; it does not tell us just *how* to regulate desire intelligently in the light of ultimate ends. If the term involved the literal application of mathematical reasoning to affairs, this might enable the philosopher to lay down authoritative rules of conduct. But for Aristotle the mean represents no possible result of mathematical calculation. The point which avoids alike the too much and the too little stands simply for an indefinite point which is expedient and generally appropriate in view of all the concrete circumstances—a point that will differ with different agents, just as an amount of food suited to a vigorous constitution will for another man be excessive. In other words, the doctrine of the mean is simply a restatement of the familiar Greek ideal of moderation, in a quasi-scientific form that really adds nothing to its significance; the question as to how the intellect is to go to work concretely to discover the proper standpoint is still left unanswered. To tell us that the mean of right giving is to give to the right person the right amount, at the right time, for the right cause, and in the right way, is obviously to fall considerably short of an explicit rule of conduct. Aristotle has, to be sure, a few practical suggestions to make. In aiming at a mean we should avoid obvious extremes, and when we cannot hit the mean exactly should take the lesser of two evils; we should observe the things to which we are particularly prone and force ourselves in the opposite direction, as we pull a crooked stick straight by bending it backward; we should be always on our guard against the enticements of pleasure,

[16] II. 7.

[17] VIII. 1, 7; IX. 10.

since pleasure is not conducive to an impartial judgment.[18] This so far as it goes is good advice. But evidently it does not go far enough.

5. Here, however, Aristotle's conclusions take a turn which lightens for him appreciably the burden of the problem, though not precisely in the way we should have expected from an enthusiast for reason. The advantage presumed to lie in rationalism depends on its satisfaction of the need men sometimes feel for self-conscious *principles* to guide them in the perplexities of conduct. But not everybody feels this need; and in any case it is seldom very adequately met. The wise man, in a moral sense, more often finds himself solving moral problems directly and intuitively, with little attempt to analyze or rationalize. He *sees,* without exactly knowing why, that this under the circumstances is for him the proper course; and the more he grows in wisdom and experience the easier the perception comes. And to such an outcome Aristotle himself is led when the empirical strain in him is uppermost. For a perception of the true ends of life, and of the demands these make on conduct in the particular case, the best guide is after all a certain moral tact or intuition which grows up gradually in any man of naturally good disposition through his contact with the world, and through the effect of numerous and cumulative acts of choice. It is in this sense that the character of the good man is the touchstone of moral truth, just as a refined gentleman, in whom good breeding has become instinctive, may be said to be a law unto himself.[19] For the most part we are pretty safe, accordingly, in following the undemonstrated assertions and opinions of old, experienced, and prudent men.[20] And if the judgment of the wise and the judgment of the many coincide, we have as sound a reason for accepting it as we can very well expect in affairs of human living.

Here, then, we finally come upon a fairly definite stand-

[18] II. 9. [19] IV. 14. [20] VI. 12.

ard, which is capable of practical service. The ideal for the average man, in his everyday conduct, is set for him by the accepted moral opinion of the day. By this is to be understood the "best" moral opinion. But the best is only that which is most respected and respectable; it is the opinion generally current among those who are recognized as the pillars of the state, its more intelligent and prominent citizens. To such an outcome we find Aristotle's own treatment clearly pointing. Thus he expressly subordinates moral theory to the need of producing good citizens; and the goodness of the citizen is relative to the character of the state in which he lives, even though this means that he must in consequence fall short of the ideally good man in stature.[21] In the same way the psychological machinery he has provided for the growth of moral wisdom presupposes an adjustment to the existing life of the community, and carries no provision for rendering a man wiser than his age or nation. It is in line with this that Aristotle's description of the virtues abjures any extravagant idealism, and contents itself for the most part with a transcription of the judgments of praise and blame current among cultivated Athenians.

And no doubt for the great majority of men morality has always meant, and possibly will always mean, the current notions of the moral virtues, in the relatively idealized form in which these have been given expression by the more vocal representatives of the type of civilization which such virtues underlie. At the same time this has its drawbacks. If the essentials of moral praise and blame were everywhere and always much the same, the judgment which tells us to look for our standards to our social *milieu* would perhaps never have been questioned, as it is in fact not often seriously questioned by those who find themselves thoroughly comfortable in the state of life to which they have

[21] *Politics* III. 4, VIII. 1.

been called. But that a touch of provincialism in moral outlook results from this can hardly be denied. To Aristotle the Greek state, just as to Hegel in more recent times the Prussian state, is self-evidently the fairest and final product of creation; at least it never occurs to him to look outside Greek civilization for any suggestion of improvement. Other institutions are too inferior to rank as more than historical curiosities; other races are by nature slavish, fit only to do the rough work which the Greek citizen would demean himself by performing. This provincialism is not an individual failing merely, but is a corollary of the attitude which tests moral judgments by their relation to the *status quo;* and it is just as much in evidence, though of course with its objects changed, in modern Germany or England as in ancient Greece.

And it becomes still more conspicuous when viewed in another dimension. Even more significant than contemporaneous differences of moral standard are those changes which the developing process of experience brings about. Nowadays it is generally recognized that ethical theory must find a place for such changes, in the past and in the possible future. And Aristotle's doctrine of development might presumably have been so handled as to meet this demand. If he had been prepared to abandon the Greek prejudice in favor of the limited and finished as against the continuous or infinite, or even had been willing to look for the fulfilment of human destiny at some considerably later date than the fourth century B.C., room would have been left for a more adequate recognition of the important fact of progress in the ethical experience. But in that case he would have been committed to a very different emphasis from the one that meets us in the *Ethics,* with its express interpretation of human happiness in terms of attainment and not of growth—an emphasis that would have meant a fluidity of moral opinion where conservatism calls only for

steadiness and finality, and a coolly critical temper of mind where conservatism demands reverence for noble conventions.

While this resort to moral intuitionism is, however, a clear point of Aristotle's doctrine, it would be a mistake to leave the matter here. To practical wisdom there must after all be added a higher wisdom before goodness reaches its true level; the good man must not only perceive and act, but he must have a speculative understanding also. And here it is necessary to bring in another fundamental feature of his theory, which it has hitherto been found convenient to postpone.

6. Aristotle had found "reality" in the intimate combination of matter and form, whereby potentiality becomes actual as a fulfilment of the type which constitutes the object's nature. To discover this type one needs to look to the outcome rather than to the start. The reality of the tree is the oak, not the acorn; the reality of human nature is the man and not the child. And if this is guarded sufficiently, it is a claim that will hardly be denied. The true essence of man does certainly seem to be more adequately represented in what he turns out to be than in the simpler form of his beginnings.

But Aristotle goes on to make a further and more questionable assumption. We are to look on principle, that is, for the essence of an object in that which *distinguishes* it from other objects, ruling out whatever they may have in common. Not only is man's true being to be found in the soul which divides animate from inanimate things, but it is to be found in a particular faculty of the soul—in reason, and *not* in life or sensation, which man shares with the lower orders.[22] And in this way the end of man, or happiness, in the last analysis comes to be described as the perfect activity of that faculty of reason which constitutes the essence of man in his distinction from all other creatures.

[22] *Ethics* I. 6.

In theory this gives a direction to the interpretation of human life which it hardly can be said to have in the common judgments to which Aristotle has been appealing. These last admit the superiority of reason. But it is reason as instrumental in the life of feeling and desire, rather than as itself a final and sufficient end. And if, instead, we conceive of the highest stage of man's development, not as taking up into itself the lower stages and getting its content from them, but as leaving them behind, we shall be compelled to shift our ethical ground. Man now appears as a being who in the end lives only to think, to exercise his reason on absolute truth; in knowledge, and in knowledge alone, is the human soul meant to find its goal. And not only does this follow from the fact that reason is the one power that separates man from the remainder of creation, including the lower types of humanity itself, but also it seems to Aristotle that it represents a true judgment of experience as well, and that the life of disinterested philosophic contemplation is plainly, for everyone who is really competent to judge, the most self-sufficient, enjoyable, and divine life.[23] Accordingly such a judgment needs to be reconciled with the more familiar position which the bulk of the treatise reveals.

As a matter of fact there is no real reconcilation, but instead a shifting back and forth between two kinds of virtue, and two different types or ideals of living. The difference is based, as in Plato, on the distinction between the two ways in which man may be said to be "rational." In its strict meaning reason is an autonomous faculty, issuing commands to the lower nature. But this lower side of man, too, may be called rational in a secondary sense, according as it has the power to recognize the authority of reason and obey it.[24] In this affinity between natural desire and rationality ethical or moral conduct in the ordinary acceptation finds its basis—that concrete life in harmony

[23] *Ibid.*, X. 7. [24] I. 13.

with the *mores* which Aristotle has chiefly been expounding. Here reason involves the apprehension of truth only in so far as truth connects with right desire. But also there is an intellectual virtue open to the *cognoscenti,* which is the perfect crown of life, and in attaining which reason is released from subservience to moral conduct and left to its own proper exercise. Aristotle grants that this ideal may seem to be too high for man; in so far as he can enjoy such a life it is not in virtue of his humanity, but of some divine element within him. Nevertheless it is only thus that he will find his truest self; and as a regulative ideal, at any rate, the conception of a pure rational activity always must come first.[25]

And here at last we have, in theory, the suggestion of a rational principle for determining a standard. If man's true good consists in the exercise of his highest function, and if this function is describable in terms of reason, then the true mean, the action proper to the circumstances, ought to be the action that is most conducive to the leading of the theoretic life. Such a standard lies in Aristotle's mind. "Whatever choice or possession of the natural goods will most produce the contemplation of God, that choice or possession is best; this is the noblest standard, and any that through deficiency or excess hinders one from the contemplation and service of God is bad." [26] Or as the writer of the *Magna Moralia* puts it, practical wisdom is the steward of the household which procures leisure for the master—philosophy—by subduing the passions and keeping them in order.[27] And as forms of character, no doubt, the virtues do have in the abstract a justification in their promotion of intellectual interests; in a general way the scholar is served by temperance and courage and the like. But it is only in a very general way. And in any case to resort to

[25] X. 7, 8; *Politics* VII. 14.
[26] *Eudemian Ethics* 1249b; *cf. Nichomachean Ethics* VI. 2.
[27] *Magna Moralia* 1198b.

this is to leave behind that dependence on commonly accepted opinions to which Aristotle has mainly been looking for his ethical premises.

7. Before concluding, however, that the relatively much greater emphasis in the *Ethics* on practical intuition, as against self-conscious rational principle, represents Aristotle's own dominant point of view, it is necessary to call attention to still one more aspect of his treatment. Aristotle deals with ethics not as a strictly independent science, but as a part of the larger science of politics. His account of the virtues gets its perspective as something that lends itself to the purpose of the statesman, whose business it is first of all to produce a certain character in the citizens, and who needs a rough knowledge of human nature for the successful performance of his task.[28] It is with moral virtue, accordingly, as a form of practical wisdom that he is in the main concerned, and not with philosophic theory; with the good of the citizen rather than of the man or the philosopher. Nevertheless we get glimpses every now and then of a more ultimate interest, such as modifies to some extent the usual impression which his treatise leaves.

In interpreting the conception of man as by nature a political or social animal, Aristotle is considerably more successful than Plato had been in avoiding those implicit drawbacks from which the historical reaction against it commonly has started. He maintains indeed, expressly, that the best life can only be lived in an organized community; even the most virtuous man is not self-sufficient, but needs the companionship of friends and the coöperation of neighbors. Nevertheless Aristotle does not lose sight of the fact, as Plato was inclined to do, that "good" in the ethical sense is something that only individuals can attain. The state is not an end in itself. It originates for the sake of life, and continues for the sake of the best life. And while this best life can only be lived in the state, it is lived

[28] *Ethics* I. 10, 13.

by the citizens of the state and not by any super-organism; the rank of the state is itself determined by the quality of life and happiness which it makes possible. This difference of emphasis underlies, for example, a good deal of Aristotle's criticism of the communistic proposals in the *Republic;* as against Plato he argues forcibly that the happiness of citizens and classes ought not to be submerged in the requirements of the social organism, that an abstract devotion to the state cannot take the place of personal interests such as get expression in the family and in property, and that the unity of society needs to be interpreted not as sameness, but as the coöperation of a variety of individual aims.

And in this way we are brought to Aristotle's last and most definite application of the notion of the theoretic life as a determining principle of conduct. The good life which it is the business of the state to make possible, and which supplies, therefore, the test by which a political constitution may be judged, is that life of cultivated leisure whose true employment is with the things of the mind.[29] To make possible a leisure class is the real end and justification of the state. This explains why, for example, Aristotle is not prepared to accept husbandmen and artisans and traders as citizens in a properly constituted commonwealth. To say that a shoemaker or a merchant cannot be a virtuous man sounds strange to us to-day. But if the true end of man is the disinterested use of leisure in intellectual pursuits, the attainment of such virtue does of course lie beyond the reach of those who, by definition, are kept from this leisure by their illiberal—non-speculative—tasks. And since if the world's work is to get along there must be men to do it, such men are in the nature of things excluded from the highest good. Accordingly Aristotle, like many others since his day, conceives of civilization as sufficiently vindicated by the existence of a leisure class of high-minded and cultivated gentlemen, supported by the labor of a

[29] *Cf. Politics* VII. 15.

menial class of peasants and workers. And if he has any scruples about this outcome—which is doubtful—he can justify it by two considerations. The practical consideration is that this really is all the mass of men are good for anyhow. Some men are slaves by nature—an assumption not without empirical evidence if the test of a free man is the capacity for scientific thought; and it is to their own advantage, therefore, that their lives should be directed by wiser minds. And the theoretic reason is that, seeing it is the distinctive and not the common character of a thing that represents its function, the sufficient end of the state must of necessity be looked for in the rare fruit of culture rather than in any more universal good.

About the content of this life of leisure Aristotle is not entirely explicit. It certainly is not in amusement that we find its content, except as a little amusement is desirable as a relief from more earnest pursuits; it is absurd, as he remarks, to hold that a man should toil and suffer all his life for the sake of amusing himself.[30] For the standards of a leisure class of wealthy *parvenus* Aristotle has nothing but contempt. Nor does art have anything like the rôle to play that it does in more recent days. The contemplation of works of art is only a form of amusement; while artistic craftsmanship belongs to the field of manual labor, so that too professional a skill in any of the arts is a disgrace to a free citizen. No gentleman will be other than an amateur.[31] There remains, to occupy the time, the direction of the necessary affairs of household and of state, where brains are required rather than manual dexterity; the pleasures of friendly intercourse among equals; and, in particular, the strictly intellectual work of the scientist and philosopher. To this may be added the vocation of a university professor who combines instruction with research—a profession which in practice would seem to represent for Aristotle the highest reach of purely human felicity.

[30] X. 6; *Politics* VIII. 3.

[31] *Politics* VIII. 2-3, 6.

One further point still needs to be noticed by way of supplement, and, possibly, of correction. To his account of reality in terms of an inseparable union of form and matter Aristotle has added another item. This is his doctrine of God as the end toward which all creation moves; and God is form divorced from matter, pure thought engaged in thinking itself. It is much easier to understand the motives that lead him to this doctrine than it is to render it consistent with his constant criticisms of Plato for the same separation of the Idea from the world of sense. However, it is an unequivocal part of his philosophy. And if we knew Aristotle less exclusively as a schoolmaster, and were permitted to enter into his more unprofessional moments, it is possible we might find him anticipating Spinoza here, and looking to man's ultimate destiny as a mystic identification with the life of God. At least it would seem to be with the contemplation of absolute truth already gained, and not with the joys of scientific discovery, that he identifies man's highest function.[32]

[32] *Ethics* X. 7.

CHAPTER IV

GREEK ETHICS (*continued*)

EPICUREANISM AND STOICISM

1. IN the historic continuation of the doctrines alike of Plato and of Aristotle in connection with the schools of which they were the founders, the ethical interest for the modern reader dwindles rapidly. No new insight appears of any considerable weight; instead, the spiritual significance which gave vitality to both philosophies in their inception tends to lose itself in a stream of technicalities. Any real importance for the development of ethical theory is confined almost wholly to two new schools which now arose to contest the supremacy of their earlier rivals.

Much more exclusively than in the case of Plato and Aristotle, it is in terms of the character of the ethical ideal as a personal form of value, rather than of its philosophical setting, that these new movements make their special contribution. Both Stoicism and Epicureanism are connected with, and in a way profess to be derived from, a theory of the world at large; and they occupy themselves to some extent with a theoretical analysis of concepts. But their chief service is performed in throwing light on the relative significance of human values, and on the technique of getting out of life what it has to offer.

Moreover, in spite of their opposition on the surface, they stand for ideals that have in reality a good deal in common. Both cater to a mood that is somewhat overborne and frightened by the outer facts, and is disposed, in consequence, to salvage what chances of happiness remain by contracting its demands and fortifying its inner resources.

It is here, most probably, that we are to look for the main difference between Epicurus and his predecessor in the profession of a thoroughgoing hedonism—Aristippus. It is not easy to be certain of the meaning of any philosophy that has come down in the form of quoted fragments, some of doubtful authenticity, and many of them open to alternative explanations. Nevertheless the likelihood seems to be that in Aristippus we have the expression of a type of hedonism much less commonly met with than might have been expected, in view of the fact that it is the nearest and most consistent form for a hedonism to take. An insistence on the vividness and immediacy of feeling, which is the strength of the hedonist's position, leads most naturally to an emphasis on the supreme significance of the present moment, where alone these qualities are found, and to the endeavor, in consequence, to make of life a succession of joyful moments, each realizing its fullest possibilities. Something of this sort is what Aristippus seems to have in mind. At least for him the good is always some pleasure desired on its own account, happiness, as a more extended state including past and future, being desirable not in its rational wholeness, but for the sake of the particular pleasures that enter into it.[1]

To be successful, however, this calls for a temperamental irresponsibility and abandon which is rather seldom found in conjunction with a vigorous intelligence, and still more seldom with the philosophic mind. And as reason more and more intrudes into the conduct of life, there arises a tendency—a tendency which begins at once to be apparent in Aristippus' followers—to temper this fine zeal for pleasure with a spirit of caution and timidity. There is a growing disinclination to take risks; though a hedonism with the spirit of adventure lacking has lost a very considerable portion of its first charm. The intenser bodily pleasures are discouraged in the interest of the milder and therefore

[1] *Diogenes Laertius* II. 87-8.

safer ones; the future and its possibilities distract the eye from the present moment; the immediate zest for life tends to be displaced by a concern for what is reasonable and prudent, and a pallid hue to creep over the original ideal of joyous living. But while this rationalized form of hedonism may not be inspiring, it is much more widely practicable. And in the form which Epicurus gives it, in particular, it has its own appeal, which has made it one of the most influential ideals that has ever issued from the workshop of the philosopher.

Technically Epicurus makes no important contribution to a refined analysis of the ethical situation. He has nothing very enlightening to say about the psychology of pleasure; and no justification is attempted of the philosopher's right in the first instance to take pleasure as the end, except by an appeal to its supposed self-evidence. For general theory, the significance of Epicureanism lies chiefly in the historical influence it has had in keeping philosophy from overlooking or minimizing an element which both the earnest moralist, and the rationally inclined thinker, are much tempted to refine away. That this is a not unimportant service is strongly indicated by the course of subsequent ethical doctrine. More than once the constitutive significance of pleasure has been finally abolished from ethics, only to have hedonism make its reappearance in some new form; and this persistence would be inexplicable apart from a real vitality in the creed for which Epicurus still remains the typical representative. The real power of Epicureanism is, however, to be looked for in a different direction—in its concrete ideal of what in particular a happy life consists in, and of the nature of the pleasures that go to make it up.

2. Roughly, historical Epicureanism stands for a life which aims to savor pleasure intelligently, while at the same time eliminating in so far as possible its risks. This will naturally involve in the first place the subordination,

if not the elimination, of those grosser aspects of the life of pleasure which furnish the most conspicuous target to the critic of hedonism; but its really persuasive note comes from more positive sources. The most obvious of these is the not inconsiderable attractiveness that lies in the ideal of the "natural" life. This means, on the bodily side, the finding of satisfaction in a temperate and rational indulgence of the senses, since genuinely satisfying pleasure depends on the health of the natural appetites, and requires a certain abstemiousness if we are to enjoy the best that they afford. Even more important is a further group of simple pleasures less clearly connected with the body—the pleasures of the intellect, of art, and, in particular, the social pleasures that arise from intercourse with congenial friends. These last are not only by nature less gross and violent, but they are lacking in another character which is a fertile source of human ills. They are, or may be made, non-competitive, thus escaping the troubles which man brings upon himself and on his fellow man through greed and selfish ambition. Such a mode of life finds, indeed, no place for most of the things that go to make up what euphemistically is called progress and a high state of civilization. It assumes that men can be content with the uncomplicated forms of life and of human relationship belonging to a rural or at most a suburban culture, without the help of luxury, military glory, and the opportunities for wealth and power offered by commerce and industry on an ambitious scale. It has always been put in practice most successfully, therefore, by individuals or by small communities of friendly neighbors; and when attempts have occasionally been made to combine it with projects for a more thoroughgoing reconstruction of society—by William Morris, for example—they have seldom carried wide conviction. Within its due limits, however, the ideal plainly has its points.

But this predilection for the simple life also gets in

Epicurus another and more characteristic turn, which in particular helps to qualify the hedonism of his predecessor. In spite of his continued insistence that pleasure is the only good, the actual goal at which he aims takes the form not of pleasures in their usual meaning, but of a settled condition of the soul whose description lends itself less to positive than to negative terms. Man's highest good is peace, serenity, cheerfulness of mind, the absence of bodily suffering and mental worry. In fact, positive pleasure turns out to be desirable not for itself, but only as a release from present pains and wants; once we are freed from pain, pleasure may be varied, but it cannot be increased.

It is not easy to extract from this any clear and consistent theory of pleasure. Seemingly it rests on the Platonic assumption that pleasures of the senses are due to the presence of desire, and that desire is a source of pain; though how this is to be reconciled with Epicurus' hedonistic starting-point is difficult to see. However, to this outcome he is committed; and it determines everywhere the practical direction in which he looks for the attainment of human satisfaction. Why should we go out of our way to seek for violent enjoyments that are precarious and hard to get, when a far easier and less dubious way is open to the one source of genuine happiness—a mind and body unperturbed? [2]

But also along with this rather indolent and irresponsible ideal there is one further element in Epicureanism of a more obviously ethical sort. While a contentment with the simple life has a primary justification in the fact that thus we are saved from many of the chances of harm that otherwise might overtake us, anyone intelligent enough to go this far is likely to go further. Calamities in the existing world cannot be escaped through any mechanical device; the simplification of life must be accompanied also by a new subjective attitude. The willingness to be satisfied with

[2] *Cf. ibid.*, X. 128, 130-1, 144, 146.

moderate goods needs amplifying into a conscious stiffening of the mental tone; it needs to take the form of an inner self-reliance, a recognition that the sources of happiness lie within rather than outside the self, and a readiness not merely to pass irrational pleasures by, but even to get along without pleasure altogether if need be, and to do it without rebellion or repining. To be masters of ourselves in our pleasures, to enjoy the passing moment indeed, but always with perfect liberty of soul, is the first and essential requirement of any true satisfaction.

It may be that in its original intention this is entirely instrumental to the attainment of the pleasant life. Independence of outward things is not a good, so Epicurus tells us, in the sense that we should aim at confining ourselves only to narrow limits of enjoyment, but to the end that when we have but little we should make the most of it, and should not overestimate the attractions of more sumptuous living.[3] A man will get a greater satisfaction out of luxury, even, if he is conscious of his ability to do without it; in that case he will not sacrifice too much for its attainment, and will be free from the timidity and fear of loss common to those whose happiness is tied to external fortune.

Nevertheless this is a new quality in the Epicurean attitude, and a quality, moreover, that stands some chance of interfering with the primary appeal which hedonism makes. It is not only that it has the possibility of an immediate value of its own, lying in a different field from that of an endeavor to exploit the life of natural joys skilfully compounded under the direction of an intelligent sophistication; the shift of emphasis to the need for self-control is apt as well to be the sign of a growing loss of confidence in the practicability of the whole ideal of pleasure-seeking, and a consequent swing in the direction of the rival goal of Stoicism. And so as a matter of fact we do find that, as was said at the start, Stoic and Epicurean have a tendency

[3] X. 130.

to converge in a common desire to escape the responsibilities of an unaccommodating world by contracting human claims to happiness; and they develop as a means to this the same virtue of inner self-sufficiency. Such a dependence on the inner self in one respect goes even a step further in the Epicurean than it does in the Stoic; and to that extent it lessens still more the contrast it has been customary to draw between the stern and tempered mood of self-reliance in the Stoic sage and the soft and dilettante character of his rival.

Among the interests which are included in the life of really intelligent pleasure-seeking, intellectual interests of some sort will naturally have a place. For Epicurus, as might be expected, this intellectual life does not take a very strenuous form. To search for an austere and difficult truth such as leads the modern scientist to live laborious days is no part of his intention; he is frankly satisfied with any plausible hypothesis, and the more numerous the alternative explanations one can think up the better. The cosmos which Epicurus asks us to accept is primarily meant not to satisfy a disinterested craving to know things as they are, but to furnish a background for his own scheme of conduct. And it is probably true that a lively amateur interest in the world about us is best catered to by the particular intellectual standpoint which Epicurus adopts—the essay at a scientific explanation of phenomena in terms of those mechanical laws which get their simplest and most easily understandable expression as a materialistic atomism. This not only gives free play to the ingenuity of the theorist without the need of too much technical preparation, but also it carries an agreeable sense of intellectual emancipation, since mechanistic explanations of the world have always been frowned upon by the spiritual authorities.

But the more direct and important motive is in Epicurus' case a further one. An atomistic and mechanical universe becomes a dogmatic element in his creed chiefly because of

its supposed ability to free us from the fears which religion, or superstition, fosters, thus leaving man with a tranquil mind to secure for himself such natural goods as circumstances offer. And it is in this sense that the Epicurean may fairly be said to go beyond his rival in that spirit of self-dependence which both philosophies attempt to cultivate. For unlike the Stoic, whose self-confidence receives a powerful support in a belief that the cards are already stacked in his favor by an overruling providence, the Epicurean expressly repudiates all such cosmic backing. Standing as he does in the midst of a universe which has not the slightest interest in his affairs, and for which evil is the same as good, it is on himself alone that he has to rely. Without assistance, and unappalled by the odds against him, he stands prepared to snatch what little joys he can from the passing stream of events, ready to accept the issue cheerfully whatever the turn of the game. Whether the good he aims at is entirely worthy of the courage shown in seeking it may be a question. But in the attitude itself there is something which adds a real æsthetic if not a moral significance to the appeal of the natural life.

3. It is, as the last paragraph implies, an entirely different background that characterizes the attitude of the rival school of Stoicism; and the fact that in the issue the two philosophies have in spite of this so much in common goes perhaps to show that metaphysical reason may in reality exercise less compulsion than philosophers like to pretend, and that the results they reach are often due less to the premises from which they start than to the implicit wishes that guide their process of deduction. For Epicurus, man is set down in a universe which is an interplay of senseless atoms, and exists as a creature who, though of slight powers and open to innumerable and strange vicissitudes, is nevertheless within his humble sphere a free agent, bound by no loyalties beyond himself, and concerned only to make the most he can of his private life under the guidance of an

unpretentious ideal of pleasure such as he finds himself directed to by the play of his inner impulses. The Stoic, too, is concerned in practice with the possibilities of his personal satisfaction. But these possibilities he proposes to arrive at, not by disregarding the cosmos which surrounds him, but by looking to this as the source of all true knowledge about himself. Instead of going his own way regardless of the greater powers of nature, it is his business as a rational being to discover how the universe is going, and adjust his own step to it. From this universe at large all human values spring. And man is, accordingly, in his endeavors after the good, not a stranger in a strange land, but the stepchild of benevolent forces which work themselves out, in part through him, but in any case inevitably and on a universal scale.

It follows that a definition of the good takes a form in direct contrast to the good as it appeals to Epicurus—a form that goes back to the more authoritative Greek tradition represented by Plato and Aristotle. There are two words which between them cover the essence of the Stoic point of view—*virtue* and *nature*. The first of these stands for the technical definition. But it is nevertheless in some ways a more enlightening description of the good to say that it is the life according to nature than to say that it is the life of virtue. For the end or essence of the human agent to which this last term points us is only describable concretely, not in terms of his own desires and their gratification—pleasure for the Stoic is expressly a corruption of natural function, and therefore to be ruled out entirely from the good—but in terms of those universal qualities that are lent to him through his participation in the Whole. The good of man is the fulfilment by man of the destiny set for him as expressing or realizing in his degree a perfect universe.[1]

Whatever may be thought of the ethical significance of

[1] *Cf.* VII. 86-89.

this Stoic conception of nature, it has had at any rate a vast influence on human thinking; and it is worth while to dwell a little further on the contrast it presents to the Epicurean doctrine. For Epicurus, too, there is a life according to nature; but the phrase has an entirely different emphasis. Since universal nature has been stripped of all qualities representing "value" and all reference to any comprehensive goal or meaning, the "natural" life is limited to *human* nature. And just as the particular atoms go their own way regardless, except as they are recipients of impacts from outside, so human nature is an agglomeration of particular activities or impulses, each asking to be gratified and none possessing any intrinsic superiority to the rest. Life according to nature, therefore, means a catholic satisfaction of the natural man governed by the first and greatest of the virtues—prudence—and aiming at the goal of unperturbed serenity of mind and body.

For the Stoic, on the contrary, starting from the other end, Nature means a single teleological whole, embracing every human act as well as every physical event in a rigid chain of destiny that serves the realization of a universal Good. As a consequence natural living no longer is identified with the primitive desires, but with the more general characteristics that belong to man by right of his contribution to the one significant meaning of the universe; we find its content not by going back to origins, but by asking what man ought to be in the light of his universal relationships. The Stoics do not overlook the natural impulses. In their psychology these are recognized as the basis of the life of conduct. But they are not the source of *virtue;* from the standpoint of the good they are indifferent. Not only is it true that virtue does not arise except as the natural capacities are subjected to the reason, but it is in this act of rational judgment and decision in which *alone* virtue consists. Impulse may be involved; but only the rational attitude itself, in its coincidence with the universal reason,

makes a man in the true sense virtuous. However in accord with nature this or that particular function may be, it is never so essential that it may not be dispensed with; and nothing is really *good* if we can get along without it.

But now from this central thesis more than one practical corollary might be drawn. In so far as the eye of the philosopher is fixed upon the cosmos, he ought, it would seem, to be impressed with the positive worth that attaches to the world, and to human life as one expression of the universal and divine. Evils here and there will no doubt force themselves upon him. But the natural logic of a pantheism in terms of teleology should lead him to minimize their weight, and to exert himself chiefly to get rid of them as mere appearance. And as a matter of fact the writings of the Stoics do constitute a storehouse from which ever since arguments have been drawn for the perennial attempts to justify the ways of God to man.

But along with this there also goes a practical attitude which might well seem to give the lie to such an assurance. The most virile aspect of the Stoic creed, and that to which its far-reaching influence is in special measure due, is its apotheosis of a resolute will—a sense of inner self-mastery and of superiority to and independence of external aids. This is the one unquestionable value in the spiritual life which is untouched by any taint of evil, and which constitutes man's only recourse if he is to stand the chance of a tolerable existence. But this would naturally suggest, alike in practice and in logic, that a world in which one has to rely upon a readiness to do without all those specific forms of good that give content to the ordinary man's understanding of the term cannot be a particularly nice or friendly world. The Stoic allows, in order to avoid too sharp a break with common sense, that such forms of good, in so far as they are "natural," do have in a technical sense a certain value—a non-moral value—which makes them deserve to be preferred to natural evils, though they are

not proper objects of desire.[5] But this does not alter the fact that for all practical purposes most things appear to him as worthless; he sets out to demonstrate that the world *must* be good just because it *seems* to him a decidedly poor and unsatisfactory sort of world.

The point of chief importance here, for an understanding of the Stoic creed, has to do with the consequences for man's concrete conduct as a political and social being. Theoretically the Stoic view of man stands in the sharpest sort of opposition to that of the Epicurean. Epicurus is a pronounced individualist. In his determination to release human life from all responsibilities in the interest of a free spirit and a perfect serenity of mind, he declines, as he was logically bound to do, to take any high view of society and social obligations. The state is not by nature, but by compact. Justice is artificial, and injustice not intrinsically bad; though the wise man will refuse to act unjustly even when it seems safe to do so, since the chance that he *may* be caught and punished is enough to upset the tranquillity at which he aims.[6] Even friendship is good primarily as a source of pleasures to oneself, and, in particular, of the added security which the possession of many friends insures.[7] Epicurus' practice here, and some of his precepts even, are much better than his theory; and in general the tone of depreciation probably is directed less at the fact of social duty than at the exaggerated claims in its behalf which nobler philosophies were making. The thesis that justice is an artificial virtue is not undeserving of consideration as against the tendency to allow right or law in the abstract to override the demand for concrete human satisfaction.[8] Still in theory there is a clear-cut separation between Epicurus' doctrine and the Stoic view that man's true nature is to be looked for, not at all in his individual existence, but in his organic unity with that

[5] VII. 105.
[6] X. 151.
[7] X. 148.
[8] *Cf.* X. 150-3.

rational whole of which human society is the proximate expression.

At the same time, in practice, the two schools show after all a tendency to converge; and one reason for this lies in the very thing that separates them in theory most widely. This is the fact that his metaphysics does not allow the Stoic to stop with the actual state of which he is a member and with the laws which create for man most of his concrete duties; it sweeps him on to a cosmopolitanism by virtue of which he has to recognize himself as first and chiefly a citizen of the world, the member of a universal Society subject to those general and abstract laws of reason which human states only very imperfectly embody. Along this line Stoicism was offering, it is true, one of its most important contributions to the history of human culture. The conception of a Law of Nature embedded in the particularities of national laws and customs, and identifiable with the common element belonging to them all, in spite of its highly abstract character, pointed one way of escape, and probably for the time being the only way, from the provincialism which characterized earlier civilizations. Before a genuine internationalism could appear as a working factor in human life, it was necessary that men's minds should become accustomed to the unfamiliar notion that their own country or race was not the sole reason for creation. And for this, in the absence of that sincere interest in individual man as such which Christianity professed to introduce, but whose practicability as a social and political force in the Roman world can be gauged by the success it actually achieved within the Christian church itself, no better tool was available than the impressive intellectual insistence on the unity of Nature and of Mankind, and on the existence of universal laws of right underlying and correcting the existing laws of this or that nation in particular. But meanwhile the recognition of himself as a citizen of the world rather than of Rome or Athens

tended, in the absence of a human brotherhood among nations, to furnish concrete ties and duties, to free man from the compulsions of the actual social life, by minimizing its significance in comparison with the vaguer claims of an ideal humanity.

Nevertheless, for a metaphysics such as the Stoics professed, the ideal cannot be sundered from the actual, so that the claims of the world as it exists are still in point of theory left binding on us. And it is in connection with the peculiar nature of the reconciliation which the Stoic here attempted that the most distinctive feature of his practical philosophy will be found. To get at this, calls for a few preliminary remarks.

4. Logically the nearest issue of the Stoic metaphysics might well seem to be a justification of the ways of God to man so thorough as to lay open to the charge of impiety any attempt to alter what, through bringing it to pass, God has shown to be his will. Such an issue in the form of a disposition to magnify the value implicit in standards that represent the *status quo,* and to urge their acceptance as a means of spiritual grace, will be met with more than once in more recent forms of a philosophic absolutism; and in the case of Stoicism, also, it is not wholly lacking. A foundation is present for it in the attitude of nominal piety which nearly all the Stoics adopt toward reputable forms of custom, institution, and belief, and their verbal unwillingness to deny that these have claims even upon the sage. It is true that, while careful to save the phrases, they reserved the right to give these an esoteric meaning of their own; and as in the case of certain modern instances, again, this resulted in a greater appearance of orthodoxy than the facts really justified. Nevertheless in the deterministic pantheism of the Stoic creed there did exist a tendency whose logical outcome would have been a passive acquiescence in all the established values to which the world has given birth—a tendency which, as Stoicism degenerated in

becoming popularized, comes into the open as a disposition on the part of the Stoic preacher to act as an apologist for the conventional morality and religion of his day.

But in the deeper and more genuine sense in which "acquiescence" enters into the attitude of Stoicism toward the universe—and this is the occasion of its paradoxes—the practical issue is a different and more complicated one. Primarily it is as a state of mind, and not as a rule of social conduct, that the Stoic's philosophy inculcates an uncomplaining acceptance of whatever *is*. It does not tell him to follow the crowd; quite the contrary, it calls for an intensely self-assertive if not a militant mood. And the explanation is that the reality to which we should submit ourselves is not the concrete world that meets us in experience, but reality at its source—the fundamental Reason which permeates all things; and this is so far from being a call to deify the actual that it stands, instead, explicitly for an *ideal*. It was the hollowness of the actual world that first had set the Stoic on his search for the ultimately real of which everyday things fall short. And the emphasis is accordingly, for him, not on *practical* compliance, but on the inner attitude of one who, using reason to separate the essential from the trivial, has then erected into an ideal good the strength of mind which can make the willing assent to this claim of Reason a sufficient substitute for all lower claims.

But here the paradox comes in. If the only good for man is in truth a mind fearless and certain of itself amid all chances, meeting alike the solicitations of pleasure and the buffetings of fortune with a refusal to call them either good or bad, resolute to allow the intrusion of no wants that are not Nature's wants as well, firm in the tranquillity that can come from nothing but an acceptance of the will of God and the secure conviction that this will is always good, what possible concern can I have with the way things turn out in the life of sense? Why should I aim at this or that

practical result in a world which, if I view it in one light, is already what God meant it to be, and which in another light would still, whatever happened to it, remain quite irrelevant to the ideal that alone has worth. At the same time the Stoic has to recognize that, on his own showing, God is *in* the world as well as an ideal above it, and that everything, if not good itself, is yet subservient to a good purpose, so that it cannot simply be ignored. How, then, is one to draw the line between a loyalty to an abstract and ideal Reason, and loyalty to the particular forms of embodied reason that supply the empirical field for any human act?

5. There are two partly distinguishable ways in which such a situation might be met, according as we start from one or the other of two closely connected aspects of the Stoic creed. There is a sense in which a passionless tranquillity of mind clearly represents the goal at which Stoicism is aiming. Whatever he may say in theory, the actual psychological lure held out before him is a certain subjective state which, as freeing him from the compulsions of a troubled life, seems to him supremely desirable. And with this emphasis uppermost, he is pushed naturally, almost inevitably, toward quietism, a passive withdrawal from life and its affairs, and a refusal of the mind to dwell upon the interests that normally engage mankind. One cannot take part in the world's business without entangling himself more or less in the responsibilities and worries that will make his peace of mind precarious. To be a patriot is, as things go, far from being a source of high enthusiasm alone; to assume family ties, and to enter into friendships, is to multiply by so much the inlets for possible cares and sorrows. Particularly is the way of the reformer hard. What more efficient method could be devised of insuring constant disappointment than by setting one's heart on raising the world to the level of the ideal? The wise man, it would seem, if he is to attain tranquillity, must turn

aside from action, and retire into the solitude of his own inner thoughts.

And for this a powerful reënforcement is at hand in the Stoic view of Nature. In the attitude of unassuming piety by one who feels his own insignificance in the presence of eternal Reason, there are possibilities of a new and religious value, whose logical issue is that mystical absorption in the divine which later finds its classical expression in Spinoza. The typical Stoic seldom gets so far as this. But the mood always hovers in the background, where it is not scared off by his more arid and scholastic preoccupations as a professional moralist; and occasionally, as in Marcus Aurelius, there are moments when a sense of the blessedness that comes from a resignation to the ways of Providence and a contemplation of the beauty and goodness of the rational Whole almost carries us beyond Stoicism into mysticism.

Nevertheless this is not a road that Stoicism can follow consistently without compromising its most characteristic tenets. Tranquillity is after all a feeling; and to exalt it into an end would be to make the Stoic ideal almost indistinguishable from that of Epicurus. The core of the Stoic's doctrine still lies, not in feeling, but in action, resolution of will, self-control. Acquiescence this does, indeed, involve. But it is not a passive acquiescence, a self-effacement in the presence of higher forces; rather does it exult in its own power and self-sufficiency, as itself an expression of the Reason that rules the universe. The act of a virtuous man is, to be sure, always an act of thought; but equally it is an act of will. It is a peculiarity of the Stoic psychology that it identifies the two things—thought and will. And just as, therefore, choice is fundamentally a judgment, an assent of the mind which it is in man's power to give or to withhold—it is this that makes possible his absolute command over the emotions, which are nothing but perverted judgments about the desirability of objects—so on the other hand the Stoic conceives of mind not as dwelling in a realm

apart, but as expressing itself necessarily in acts which involve a material body also. Only the action of the will is worthy to be called a good. But the exertion of the will rests on the natural conditions of organic life, and cannot cut itself loose from the world of human conduct.

It is in an attempted reconciliation of tranquillity with action that the Stoic temper gets its focus. And the reconciliation is effected simply by taking the two main theses as they stand, and combining them. The universe is the expression of reason and of purpose; and in the natural constitution of man and the natural order of society we have the prophecy of what for man makes up the life of reason which the will is to adopt. In consequence he will live this life, accept the duties it imposes, coöperate in the universal enterprise. But none of these things in themselves is *good;* that is a term which applies only to the right direction of the will itself. Very well, then, he will not call them good or set his heart upon them; he will not permit them to arouse desire or excite emotion. He will exercise his duties as a citizen not from any sense of patriotism, but solely because it is the right thing to do. He will assume the responsibilities of a family because it is a human function to carry on the race, not out of any affection for wife or children. He will aim to do good to his fellow man, but only from a sense of duty. In general he will perform conscientiously the tasks which God by placing him in the world imposed upon him. But at the same time he will protect his own self-sufficiency by resolutely excluding from his mind all the emotions—love or pity or regret—which open the door to disturbing cares, and all desire to see things turn out in this way rather than in that; the outcome he will leave to God, dissociating himself meticulously from every concern except for his own inner poise of mind.

Such an aloofness, if lived up to honestly, is at least impressive; perhaps it is even admirable. If one cannot

manage a belief in the worth-whileness of the issue it may still be better that he should continue to play the game, and find in his own courage and integrity the substitute for a more comforting and objective faith. At the same time, when all goodness is whittled down to the goodness of an unbending will, there naturally must arise a doubt as to how long even this can stand. And the doubt is not lessened by other consequences that ensue. A philanthropy totally without love or hope escapes some of the dangers that attend the ordinary practice of benevolence. It broadens a field that may be limited by the strength of natural ties; and sometimes it may prevent these from coming into conflict with the more general but, for the average person, less appealing principles of abstract justice. Possibly for the negative side of justice it even affords an adequate basis. Here at any rate will be found what is most convincing in the moral teachings of the Stoic—his repudiation of envy, self-seeking, partiality, and everything that assumes the right of one man to prosper at the expense of others. But it is markedly less successful in providing a ground for positive duties of helpfulness. If the things that men usually call good are in reality not good at all, there is plainly no reason why we should try to secure them for other people any more than for ourselves.

And the one duty which it does inculcate unequivocally itself helps to cast a doubt on the entire admirableness of the Stoic temper. If the only genuine good is self-sufficiency, there is but one way in which we can help our fellows to attain this positive good—by preaching to them and reforming them. It is not necessary to deny the usefulness of the preacher. But philanthropic exhortation which expressly dissociates itself from any interest in or affection for the individual man, which refuses on principle to make allowances for human weakness, which divides mankind into two great exclusive classes, the wise men

and the fools, and avoids condemning sinners only by despising them, has never been found in practice very efficacious.

6. It may throw some light on the ideal to turn for a moment in conclusion to the predecessors of the Stoics. In Cynicism, and conspicuously in the striking personality of Diogenes, the same ideal of self-sufficiency appears freed from the logical compulsion of the objective background to which Stoicism is tied. There is none of the Stoic's piety toward the universal Laws of Nature as embodied in the framework of society; instead we find everywhere a caustic criticism of all the accepted social conventions and an ideal of the "natural" man such as reappears in modern times in the conception of the noble savage, without property, settled abode, country—an ideal even more atomistic than that of Epicurus. The aim of the wise man is to disentangle himself completely from the ties that bind him, not to pleasures merely, but to his fellow man, and indeed to everything except his barest physical needs, and to find his satisfaction solely in his ability to stand on his own feet in independence of all external aids.

It is usual to contrast Diogenes here with the more reputable of the Stoic sages, and find him plainly wanting. Still this is not an inevitable conclusion; after all there is a healthy and objective note in Diogenes' radicalism. We may think of him, that is, as a less urbane continuer of that part of the Socratic mission which shows itself in his profession as a gadfly of the state—a bitter but salutary critic of the shortcomings of civilized society in his day. It is this moral fervor, rather than any doctrine of personal good, that is the really characteristic aspect of the teachings of the Cynics; and it lends to Cynicism at its best an attractiveness to the realistic mind which Stoicism somehow misses. That in the end morality cannot be merely critical and destructive is doubtless true. At the same time a savage contempt for the stupidities and hypocrisies that rule the

world is useful in its place; and there is something to be said for giving it a freer play than Stoicism with its conventional pieties can easily permit. At any rate, if we are forced to choose between such a mood of righteous indignation and the smug sense of superiority and condescension toward which Stoicism continually is gravitating, the advantages are not all of them on the Stoic's side.

CHAPTER V

THE ETHICS OF THE CHURCH

Thomas Aquinas

1. In their larger features the contributions of Greek philosophy to ethics still remain as presuppositions of which the modern theorist is compelled to take account; and a number of influential modern tendencies are definitely a reversion to Plato and Aristotle, modified in their details rather than in essential principles. Nevertheless the general complexion of modern ethical thought leaves on the whole a substantially different impression from that which one receives from its earlier forms. The difference arises from two main sources—on the one hand Christianity, with its revaluation of the human spirit, and on the other the developments of naturalistic science, alike as a theory of human and of universal nature. It is the latter influence that more particularly shapes the course of speculation in the modern era. But before turning to consider this, a few general remarks are due the intermediate period of the Middle Ages, in the person of its ablest and most representative thinker, St. Thomas Aquinas.

Speaking broadly, Aquinas' ethical theory adopts as its framework the Aristotelian view that happiness is man's goal, and that happiness comes from realizing the essential "form" of humanity to be found in reason—in the "activity of the best power working on the best objects." Occasionally a good deal of ingenuity has to be employed in order to hold to Aristotle without violating theological prepossessions; but on the whole the connection

is close enough to make it unnecessary to cover the ground again. For the present purpose it is enough to consider in a general way the second or specifically Christian element to which the more novel features of Aquinas' ethics are due.

It is important to observe, at the start, the very moderate extent to which the source of such a modifying influence will be found in that free spirit of human love and service, and that sense of the value of a man himself apart from institutional religion, which gives to the early Christian gospel its peculiar ethical appeal. Of course in a measure the spirit of primitive Christianity makes its way into the life of the organized Church and affects Aquinas' portrait of the virtuous man as compared with that of Aristotle. But the Church was no longer an oasis set down in the midst of an alien culture; it had conquered the world and imposed on it institutions of its own. And it was inevitable that the new virtues, therefore, under an identity of nomenclature, should have taken on more than a touch of that formal character to whose absence their first attractiveness had been in considerable measure due. Charity in the Church is still fundamental; but it has become identified in large degree with almsgiving on the one hand, and on the other with the infusion of a mysterious supernatural grace. Repentance now has its inseparable connection with penance; humility is a carefully regulated duty rather than a spontaneous sense of relative values; faith ceases first of all to be the inner urge of the human soul and tends to become an intellectual assent to propositions, thus reimposing on the spiritual life a theological orthodoxy from which it had been one chief business of Jesus and Paul to free it. That this represents a net loss of more or less serious proportions is probably obvious. At the same time it cannot be evaluated fairly without keeping in mind the problem which the Church had on its hands. As the guardian of civilization, as well as of the moral interests of the individual, it found itself practically forced to manipulate moral standards to an

extent in order to make them available for social needs; and the success which it achieved in retaining a place within its program for so rich a variety of ethical motives, and handing them down to the modern world, is on the whole great enough to justify a certain tolerance toward the inevitable depreciation which in the process these values undergo.

Technically the peculiarities which give their special tone to the ethics of the Church stand connected in particular with that somewhat confusing aspect of Aristotle's doctrine which is found in the notion of the contemplative life. Like Aristotle, Aquinas distinguishes two grades of excellence. Moral conduct in the usual sense still remains an essentially naturalistic conception. The natural impulses are a genuine part of human nature, to whose perfection it belongs to have passions so long as these are held in check by reason; all things to which a man has a natural inclination are apprehended by reason as good, and therefore are to be pursued. But along with this also goes Aristotle's further doctrine of an ultimate or rational good, and of contemplation as man's highest felicity. Otherwise, indeed, the Church would have been hard put to it to adapt Aristotle to its purposes.

And in the quasi-personal God of Aristotle, as an object of contemplative knowledge, it had a convenient instrument at hand for grounding the new theological virtues—faith, hope and love—which it contributes to ethical doctrine, and through which one leaves behind the realm of nature and becomes a candidate for eternal salvation. But the God of Christianity is much better adapted than Aristotle's God for the service here demanded of him. At least it now is possible to bring down contemplation from the regions in which only the philosopher or the mystic move at ease, and to put it in some fashion within the reach of the ordinary man to whom the Church had to cater. "Knowledge" still stands as the goal of man, and his highest form of blessedness. But the vision of truth is supple-

mented by the love of a personal being through whose free action supernatural graces are infused, and by the hope of a heavenly future through the acceptance of these gifts. Still more important, knowledge is no longer speculative; it takes the form of faith. Here, to be sure, we have the seed of future trouble. Nevertheless faith has at least this practical advantage over knowledge, that whereas only the rare philosopher or scientist can *know,* even the most stupid mind can take the truth on trust.

Furthermore, for the needs of the Church this notion of religious faith has a speculative usefulness as well. It avoids the need of committing oneself explicitly to either of two alternatives between which the Greek ideal of contemplation had wavered—the ideal of ultimate principles of reason grasped by intuition, and the mystical ideal of a vision of truth which also comes by intuition, but by a sort of intuition for which values are more significant than logic. In strictness, the virtue of faith is neither of these. It rests primarily on the notion of a fence or bar within the total field of truth which the human mind finds itself unable to pass, and whose recognition is due less to any spiritual insight than to the need for rationalizing a logically difficult situation, brought about by religious formulas handed down from a less sophisticated age, and now so thoroughly bound up with the principle of authority as to be incapable of modification. At the same time the doctrine that there is a truth too high for human reason to grasp does lend itself as well to the genuine religious need for wonder, and so provides an outlet for the craving after a mystical and emotional understanding. The mysteries of religion may be cheapened when they are made to consist in authorized propositions to be accepted prior to any need for individual insight. Still the possibility of such insight is not excluded. And meanwhile from the Church's standpoint there is the special advantage that in this way a ground is provided also for the exercise of authority in belief, and for holding in

check the vagaries of mysticism on the one hand, and the insolence of finite reason on the other.

2. It is this last motive—of authority—that supplies what is perhaps the most pervasive new element in the content of ecclesiastical ethics. The first impression which one gets of the difference in spirit between the ethics of the Church and that of either of its two main sources is the far-reaching encroachment of legalism in the sphere of conduct. Where primitive Christianity was disposed to turn from law to a reliance on inner and spontaneous springs of goodness, and where Greek ethics rather narrowly limited the domain in which anything like exact rules can be laid down, in Aquinas what amounts to cases of conscience in detail occupies a very large share of his treatment. Everywhere looming large in his discussion is a preoccupation with the nature of sins and their relative degrees of blackness. New and significant sins make their appearance, which get a peculiar eminence just through their flouting of lawful authority; the sin of unbelief is greater than all sins of moral perversity, and blasphemy is worse than murder.[1] The virtues, too, take on something of the same legalistic flavor; and behind the subtle distinctions of relative merit one catches glimpses of an audience concerned with the works that are necessary to salvation, and depending more on reasoned distinctions laid down for them as to the acts by which merit is to be acquired than on any inner glow of love for virtue on its own account.

It does not at once follow that this tendency toward casuistry is a failing. The need to which the casuist ministers is a genuine one. So long as life remains what it is, distinctions and exceptions to any general principle will be found assuming an importance in our choices; and the more acute the concern for moral character, the more strongly is the importance likely to be felt. No man can desire perfection in an imperfect world without being forced at times

[1] *Summa Theologica* II-II. q. 10. art. 3; q. 13. art. 3.

to make fine discriminations; and in the Middle Ages it was inevitable that this task should be taken in charge by someone in an authoritative way. The business of the Church, as has been remarked, was not religious and ethical inspiration merely; it had a responsibility for social order also. And under the circumstances this responsibility could be met only by assuming a control of conscience in a somewhat thoroughgoing manner.

Nevertheless the necessity is one which was bound to introduce a complication. In theory the human soul can be satisfied with nothing short of perfection. But it is only through an infusion of the theological or supernatural virtues that perfection is attained; and these lift the ethical life to a plane where it becomes a serious question as to the ability of average humanity to follow. God is the one absolute and perfect good; and until God has become all in all, man has not reached his true end, which is to contemplate God in his divine essence and enjoy him forever. For the more continuous and undivided an activity is, the greater the happiness; and there is more of the essence of happiness, therefore, in a life busy with the one occupation of contemplating everlasting truth than in the life of active conduct distracted with many things.[2] But here we enter a realm where the labors of the casuist become irrelevant; in fact one very well may ask what meaning still attaches to the sort of morality which casuistry serves. And since on the other hand the Church could not afford to overlook the needs of practical attainment any more than those of spiritual perfection, a good deal of ingenuity was called for in order to reconcile the two demands.

And first, at the lower end, it was necessary to qualify substantially the ideal requirements of Christian charity and the absoluteness of the moral law, if these were not to lose their contact with average human nature and existing social institutions. Once grant this need for tempering

[2] *Ibid.,* I-II, q. 3. art. 2.

ideals in the interest of a common-sense opportunism, and Aquinas' treatment shows a mixture of moral purpose and of practical realism which on the whole is excellent of its sort, and which is calculated to raise the general level of morality without making demands that are too exacting to have some chance of exerting an effective influence. The more paradoxical precepts of the gospel—to love our enemies or to turn the other cheek—are scaled down sufficiently to remove their paradox, while still leaving a goal for the ordinary man to aim at higher than his common practice. Similarly, by drawing on the distinction between the universality of God's law and the particularly of its application —with the help of some ingenuity in exegesis—a place is found for such exceptions to the divine commandments as the state of the nation seems to require. Thus murder, as prohibited in the decalogue, is not really murder if it occurs under proper auspices; and in the same way the warning of the gospels does not apply to lawful warfare, since a man cannot be said to "take" the sword when he merely uses the weapon committed to his hands by his superiors.[3] Virtues are not to be given an extravagant interpretation which ignores more worldly considerations: charity, for example, apart from very special circumstances, is extreme and foolish if it means giving so much to the needy as to interfere with the normal demands which our station in life makes upon us.[4] Even the claims of religion are to be dealt with diplomatically.[5] If all men were to choose the better part, the world's business would never get done; the Church is to use sound judgment, here as elsewhere, and not allow ideal requirements to jeopardize the working situation. It will allow that relatively, and in particular cases, the active life is to be chosen in preference to the contemplative life for the necessities of our present time; and it will even dissuade willing candidates when reasons of expediency or

[3] II-II. q. 40. art. 1. [4] II-II. q. 32. art. 6. [5] *Cf.* II-II. q. 10. art. 11.

duty—the need of supporting parents, for example—stand in the way.[6]

Any impression in detail of moral mediocrity which this toning down of the spiritual life may seem to give is appreciably lessened by a sympathetic interpretation. In general the Church is acting on the principle that underlies its ever-recurrent distinction between mortal and venial sins—in a rough definition, between those sins that show a real perversion of the will and a conscious direction away from the true good, and those which are due merely to the frailties of human nature, and which lead a man astray incidentally, as it were, and without involving a persistent trend to evil. It recognizes that in most men's lives the love of God cannot mean a complete absorption in the divine vision, to the exclusion of other goods. Even the saint cannot claim perfection. It is enough if one is moving in the direction of perfection and has trusted himself to those deep-running currents of the universe through which God lends his aid to human weakness. Man is not asked to accomplish the impossible; to avoid sin one only need do the best he can as the condition of his state requires, provided he does not despise the idea of doing better.[7] In this way virtue is placed practically within the reach of all, while at the same time progress in virtue is provided through the growing refinement of man's realization of, and love for, the values that alone give merit to his acts.

If the Church had stopped here, however, it would have exercised historically a much less potent influence than it did exert. The conception of a growing purity of heart transforming daily life is salutary, but not spectacular. And in a relatively crude state of culture such as existed in the Middle Ages, the pressure of the world might well have been too heavy for the Church had she not found some way

[6] II-II. q. 182. art. 1; q. 101. art. 4.
[7] II-II. q. 184. arts. 3, 5; q. 186. art. 2.

of holding up before men's eyes a more striking model of perfection, disentangled from the everyday affairs that might obscure or seem to cheapen it. One way of doing this, which the Church did not neglect, was to supplement the earthly life with a future one, and to locate the perfection we cannot here attain in a heavenly existence. But the effect on conduct of a belief in immortality has always been uncertain. And when to practical needs we add the logical demands of the philosophy which the Church adopted, the shaping of another and more characteristic ideal of human good was bound to follow.

3. This logical pressure comes, once more, from the acceptance of contemplation as the final goal. As contemplation, knowledge is almost sure to pull away from its intimate connection with the active life and to take on a more exclusive form. And especially when the contemplative love of God is translated into the worship of a supernatural being whose essence is to be looked for apart from the empirical world and its concerns may we expect consequences to happen for the higher morality of the Church. Such a contemplative ideal could always be interpreted by subtler and rarer natures so as to meet the more intimate needs of the moral and religious life. But the features which it presents most vividly to the popular mind are of a less obviously desirable sort. Even in the case of those who make it their specialty, the effects of setting up an exclusive brand of virtue separate from the virtue called for in ordinary conduct are not in every respect wholesome. And for the others—always the great majority—the advantage that comes of having the claims of a standard of perfection forced on their attention is counterbalanced by the fact that such a standard, by being cut off from humbler duties, ceases in large measure to serve as a guide and inspiration; it tends to lose touch with reality and to take on an official and conventional form prejudicial to the real interests alike of religion and of ethics.

That the danger is not a remote one is apparent in connection with nearly every prominent feature of the spiritual ideal to which the Church lent its sanction. In the first place, from the standpoint of the natural life which most men have to live it is almost wholly negative in its precepts. To find the root of sinfulness in a heart set on fleshly lusts is one thing; it is quite another to urge that the perfection of charity consists in withdrawing as far as possible even from lawful temporal things that occupy the mind and hinder the movement of the heart to God. There is a virtue, doubtless, in the ascetic vocation of the occasional man whose devotion to some special form of good leads him to a more rigorous denial of the senses than average humanity would find convenient; and here lies the chief empirical service of the new ideal. If now and then examples were not forthcoming to give dramatic expression to the possibility of rooting out the natural interests and passions, the rest of the world might find it easier to overlook the need of regulating them. The doubt comes in when we erect the two demands into competing ideals, the one a morality of common life just good enough to pull a man through, but not touched with spiritual fire and beauty, and the other a special sort of holiness distinguished from ordinary virtue, and set on a pedestal above it. For in doing this we are nullifying the very facts from which goodness starts. It is impossible to exalt virginity over continence in marriage without implicitly condemning marriage and magnifying the negation of the natural impulses; or to hold that the virtue of an action is enhanced when it is done in fulfilment of a vow, except at the risk of lowering the sense of its intrinsic obligation.[8]

Of course the Church did not as a matter of fact leave the higher virtue without a positive content of its own. But the only way it could supply the need was by creating an entire new set of duties, largely irrelevant to the require-

[8] II-II. q. 152. art. 4; q. 88. art. 6.

ments of moral conduct. These duties consist in religious exercises in their ritualistic sense, tinctured by new virtues that grow out of the abnegations which such exercises involve—chastity, poverty, obedience. The new content has an obvious practical utility, since without it the religious life would be too bare and tenuous to serve the Church's needs. But also it invokes a dangerous principle. It may be true that the religious duties are not intended in the first place to have an independent value. Religion as such is not the final goal. It is the expression of man's love for God through external acts of worship; and it has its justification not in any merit of its own, or any inherent baseness in the life of the body, but because the mood and practices of worship, by removing obstacles, are more conducive than action is to the contemplative enjoyment of God which is man's highest function.[9] Nevertheless while this is so in theory, in practice the offices of religion began at once to take on an immediate value which not only does not belong to them in their own right, but which was bound to depress in the scale whatever entered into competition with them. In draining off emotional fervor into new channels, they could hardly avoid leaving morality tasteless in comparison.

4. The internal deficiencies likely to develop in connection with too great an emphasis on the duties of religion are, in particular, of two sorts, standing in close logical relationship. In the first place, in spite of the fact that they are supposed to be devoted to the service of an absolute and objective good, and are meant to satisfy the need for a perfect or infinite ideal, they show a suspicious readiness to be diverted into a form which nullifies both these aims. Instead of linking themselves with an aspiration after the unattained or unattainable, the demands of worship are much more capable of being realized with precision and completeness than are the demands of plain moral goodness; and

[9] II-II. q. 186. art. 1.

their exercise quickly degenerates into formal habits which dull instead of quickening the emotions they are presumed to satisfy.

And at the same time they encourage what has always been the peculiar danger of a theological ethics—the tendency to give an egocentric twist to the life of duty, and to make, not God's glory after all, but personal salvation through the acknowledgment of his glory in duly ordered ways, the real end of man's effort. The same emphasis that drains off from the virtues most highly esteemed by the religious man their specifically moral flavor has a similar effect on his conception of God himself. Any move to lower the rank of moral goodness as men understand goodness, especially when to this is added the high importance assigned to right intellectual beliefs about the mysteries of theology, has its almost unavoidable consequence in a change in our ideas of God's own nature, and a disposition to interpret this in terms less of goodness than of *power*, and of the authority which power lends. But to worship God's power, experience shows is likely to be the same as worshiping him with an eye directed to the consequences such power will have for the interests of the worshiper; and so the emphasis gravitates toward a self-centered if not a selfish notion of the good.

The same doubt may very well arise in connection with the place which the "social" holds in Aquinas' conception of the moral end, though here also a case can be made in his behalf. Notwithstanding a large element of utilitarianism, Aquinas is not in sympathy with the modern disposition to erect the social welfare into the final standard of morality. After all it is man that is real, and not mankind. If the good is not realized by this or that man in particular, it is not realized at all. And in case, therefore, a man does not love himself—his own spiritual nature and capacities—next after God, who is the source and embodiment of goodness, and does not recognize that what there is of good in him is

in no wise inferior to the same good in others,[10] he abandons the only standard by which comparative values can be judged and runs the risk, through his humanitarianism, of subordinating the essence of goodness to some external and secondary benefit to his fellows.

But while this constitutes an antidote to the disposition to lose sight of the quality of life—realizable only by the individual—in its mere indefinite extension, and so to the possibility that by failing to cultivate the best in ourselves we may cheapen the contribution we can render to the world, it also may lead the individual to minimize the importance to his own spiritual attainment of his relationship to man as compared with his relationship to God. In a way it is wholesome to remember that one has a personal connection with the good aside from the mere fact that he belongs to the crowd—that, as Aquinas says, if there were only one soul enjoying God it would still have within itself the source of happiness.[11] The love of one's neighbor does follow secondarily from the perfect love of God in this sense at least, that it is due not to his mere existence as a natural being, but to our recognition in him of the same objective values that we respect in ourselves. At the same time this involves a moral risk. Even when God still remains a spiritual or emotional value, the mystic cannot enjoy this without loss except as he is prepared to go to some trouble in order to share it with his fellows. And in so far as God is turned into an all-powerful ruler having in his hands the keys of another world, the love of one's neighbor ought in logic to become, and does in fact usually become, a mere appendage to the individual relationship between God and the soul, and our duty toward other men a mere incident in the quest for personal salvation, to be subordinated, or even set aside at times, for the sake of superior and supernatural claims.

[10] II-II. q. 26. art. 4; q. 161, art. 3.
[11] I-II. q. 4. art. 8.

There are two other consequences that might appear to be encouraged by the disposition to look down on common goodness as an inferior variety—consequences which to a degree are spiritual opposites. It might result in an agonizing sense of the remoteness and unattainability of the perfect good, rendering us dissatisfied with any realizable goal and driving us to an anxious and introspective preoccupation with our inner state. Or it might lead, on the other hand, to a comfortable sense of superiority to other men who do not have the same refined sensibilities as ourselves, and so to the creation of a moral aristocracy.

But whatever the logic implicit in the doctrine of a twofold virtue, both of these consequences will as a matter of fact be found much less prominent in medieval ethics than in the subtler idealisms of more recent times. Here again the Church showed its usual ingenuity in holding rival tendencies in check in the service of its practical needs; neither the snobbishness of the moral aristocrat nor the self-absorption and ineffectualism of the introspective analyst are greatly in evidence. And in part it is the very imperfections of the ecclesiastical ideal that are enlisted to accomplish this result. Religious exercises may tend to become formal and external; but while men are kept busy with them they will at least have less time for spiritual sentimentality and dilettanteism. And since, too, it is not by the private consciousness, but by ecclesiastical authority, that moral rules are formulated, a zeal for moral discriminations will naturally be diverted into the more objective field of casuistry.

So likewise to spiritual pride an antidote exists in that submission of the will which the Church insists on as the highest religious virtue. Here, too, the cure stands in need of treatment. Possibly the most dubious feature of an ecclesiastical ethics is the premium it places on a subjection to authority. That man should make to God a gift of his self-will as his highest service may be sound doctrine;

though the claim that all the works of virtue have merit with God as being done in obedience to his will, and that it is to the slight put upon God that the debt of punishment in all sins is due,[12] has a doubtful sound to modern ears. What actually and in practice obedience comes to is, however, something different from this. It is a submission not to God but to his representatives on earth. And when we are told there is nothing greater man can give to God than for his sake to submit his will to the will of a duly constituted superior,[13] the advantages become more questionable. On the other hand it is to be remembered also that there perhaps could not have been devised a more practical way of discouraging the spirit of vainglory inherent in the existence of a separate moral class which aims at an exclusive excellence than by a rigid discipline to crush self-will and self-esteem, and to inculcate humility and obedience to orders.

[12] II-II. q. 104. art. 3; I-II. q. 73. art. 1.
[13] II-II. q. 186. art. 5.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN NATURALISM

Hobbes

1. Modern ethical theory may properly be said to start with Thomas Hobbes. Here we have for the first time, on a large scale, the attempt to bring to ethics that characteristically modern point of view describable as scientific naturalism. Not all subsequent theory is "scientific" in this peculiar sense; but even when the so-called methods of science in the ethical field are expressly attacked, the very hostility has usually been a main factor in shaping the alternative doctrine. In Hobbes' own case such a negative form of influence has been on a particularly extensive scale, and for two generations and more the one common motive that can be presupposed in nearly every English writer of whatever school is the determination to refute the "selfish theory" to which Hobbes' name is attached.

The man who, imbued thoroughly with the scientific spirit, turns his attention to the ethical field is apt to find his good intentions met by certain initial difficulties. Generally speaking he is animated by a dislike and distrust of the "idealist" who has tended to preëmpt the field; and he sets out, in opposition to idealism, to be exact, empirical, and tough-minded. But he is confronted by the fact that the tool which usually serves him in scientific analysis—mathematics, namely—is not by any stretch of the imagination capable of being applied to human living directly and unambiguously, in our present state of knowledge. In the absence of mathematical precision the only recourse is to logical precision. And accordingly he is likely to embark

on the search for some relatively simple point of view, not too far from the region of empirical reality, in terms of which the data can be brought into a degree of order capable of taking the form of logical deduction from admitted premises. Also, in order to render such a method workable, and at the same time to convey an atmosphere of scientific realism, the facts which he takes as fundamental will invariably be arrived at by interpreting human nature historically and in its lower terms, rather than in terms of future and ideal possibilities about which empirical doubt can easily be raised. In a quite similar fashion the science of political economy has, in the past, been able to demonstrate relatively unbending laws of economic life by setting aside all those qualities of human nature that do not belong to the economic man, thus securing a subject matter simple enough to permit of the deductive process getting under way.

In the two aspects, however, of a scientific ethics—its subject matter and its logical premises—there lies the chance of a divergence in method and results which has a considerable importance for the interpretation of Hobbes' position in particular. As a naturalistic account of human nature in the concrete, it leans in the first instance toward empiricism. In so far as it is its ambition, on the other hand, to deduce rules of conduct authoritatively from ultimate principles, it continues in a new form the rationalistic tradition of the past. In general the "selfish" theory which has given Hobbes his popular reputation is connected with his empirical interest; while it is his intellectualism that qualifies the first impression, and casts doubt upon its adequacy. It will be found convenient to consider the second and more systematic treatment before turning to the other.

2. Hobbes' intellectualism, it is essential in the first place to observe, is in the service primarily not of a theory of ethics, but of a political philosophy, or theory of the state. In the process of deducing this theory Hobbes introduces

that rather unpleasant view of human nature which has earned him his ethical disrepute. But in reality he has no intention of magnifying the claims of the "natural" man. On the contrary, he is concerned to prove that the only tolerable life of man is a life within organized society. His quarrel is not with the recognized social virtues, for which he has an even exaggerated respect, but with the logical foundations on which they are made to rest in the common manner of justifying them. Before his ethics can be dealt with, therefore, it is necessary to consider at some length this larger interest to which his theory of human nature is subordinate.

Hobbes sets out to defend civil authority against the revolutionary principles which in his day were tearing England with fratricidal strife, and, in particular, against those notions of ecclesiastical authority on the one hand, and of the liberty of the private conscience on the other, which proposed to place limits on the power of magistrates in the interest either of ambitious prelates or of turbulent sectaries. Under the circumstances it might well seem to many minds that even a ruthless exercise of despotism was preferable to the chaos of civil warfare, and that, accordingly, the first business of a rational science of politics was to establish immovably the foundations of sovereignty. And this would seem specially plausible to a man like Hobbes, with his entire lack of intellectual sympathy with either superstitions or enthusiasms, and with his modest demand only to be left in peace and quiet to live the life of a scientific thinker.

In pursuance of this undertaking Hobbes makes his start with man conceived as in a state of nature, outside the restraints of civil authority; and his endeavor is to show that the intolerable state of things which this entails can only be avoided through the creation of a sovereign power for the restraint of individual liberty of action—a power which logically demands just the status that the extreme

advocates of absolute monarchy were in the habit of claiming for King Charles or King James. And here at the outset it is well to call attention to one matter which is apt for the modern mind to blunt the edge of Hobbes' argument. This state of nature he often speaks of in a way to suggest that it actually precedes the rise of civil society, which comes about by the concerted action of men dissatisfied with their earlier condition. As a matter of fact, Hobbes very likely had some such notion in his mind. But on the whole the historical interpretation is relatively unimportant to his real meaning; the main force of his argument is dependent on the analysis of a permanent situation rather than on the correctness of an historical picture.

Without attempting for the moment to make any separation between the ethical and the political aspects of Hobbes' doctrine, his reasoning may be summed up as follows: If we look at human nature without any idealistic glamour, and ask what would happen were men not under the restraint of a superior authority, we can reach a pretty safe conclusion by considering what takes place in the affairs of nations, which are in precisely the situation with reference to one another that individual men would be on the hypothesis proposed. What we see is a permanent state of warfare, actual or impending, with fear omnipresent and force the only law. In this warfare no ideal of justice rules. A nation has the right to what it can get and keep; and in the exercise of this right it does not hesitate to encroach on the claims of weaker nations. Indeed it is forced to such an unlimited aggression by the law of self-preservation even apart from the driving of natural greed. It is not enough to meet attacks when they arise; it must anticipate and prepare against them. And the only adequate preparedness is to render others powerless and enslave them before they have the chance of enslaving us. Reason itself, accordingly, urges every nation to aim at universal dominion. And since this is difficult or impossible to attain, the result has been

the turbulent course that history has followed—a succession of wars, interrupted by brief intervals of peace which are occupied by preparations for the next war. And the only thing that protects individual men from the same misfortune is the fact that for them there exists, as there does not exist for nations, a superior power capable of keeping them in order. Were it not for this their state would be even worse than it is under national rivalries, by so much as the extension of the field of competition would intensify the struggle, while at the same time it would leave each man almost totally dependent on his individual resources.

Assuming, then, that man, in desiring self-preservation, desires also whatever is necessary to secure this effectively, he will, in so far as he is a rational being, wish to come to a *modus vivendi* with his fellow men such as will alleviate his brutish lot. If any man were so much superior to all other men together as to make it likely he could impose his will upon them, this naturally would be the course he would prefer.[1] But since men in their physical strength are not so far apart but that chance or cunning lays the stronger open to possible destruction from the weaker, it is in another direction that reason points for an avenue of escape. What cannot reasonably be expected from force may be accomplished by a common agreement or covenant. A man would gain vastly in the end by voluntarily giving up his natural right to encroach on the preserves of other men, *provided* he could be assured that, in return, they all would deal in the same way with him. It is the general recognition that this offers the sole possibility of a quiet life that supplies the logical condition, if not the historical starting-point, of existence in society. Society is based on a covenant, expressed or implied, to the effect that every man gives up his right of aggression against other men on condition that they agree to a similar indulgence toward himself.

But to this now must be added a further and indispens-

[1] *De Cive,* Ch. i, 2; *cf. Leviathan,* Ch. xxxi.

able condition. Some security needs to be provided that this covenant actually will be lived up to. It is not reasonable to ask me to make a sacrifice unless I am assured of the ends at which the sacrifice was aimed; and these ends would be defeated were each man at liberty to break the covenant whenever it seemed to his personal advantage to do so. Were all men purely rational beings such a risk might be negligible; temptation to make an exception to the general rule in one's own case would at once be checked by the recognition that only as the rule is universally followed will the benefits that I myself expect from it accrue. But men are not purely rational. And accordingly there is only one way in which the covenant, from an aspiration, can become a fact—if, that is, some force exists powerful enough to compel equal dealing on the part of all alike. Before society can arise, then, each man must be prepared not only to abandon his own unrestrained liberty of action, but to turn over the force which he represents to some single agency, to be used by that agency, when pooled with the remainder of the latent force in society, for the ends which all alike desire—peace and security. The essential condition of the social state is thus the creation of a sovereign power in which all individual forces are combined, and which can use its power coercively to bring about the state of peace and mutual tolerance which man's reason tells him is his only salvation, but which this same reason forbids him to presume upon until he can be certain that everybody else will do the same.

From this governing insight Hobbes draws a variety of important conclusions, meeting difficulties and objections by the way with a remarkable display of ingenuity. It follows, to begin with, that sovereignty must be absolute, unlimited, and inalienable if it is to perform the required service; for the moment citizens are allowed rights of any sort against their sovereign, that moment an element of weakness is admitted into the machinery which is the sole

guarantee of peaceful coöperation. As a matter of fact—and this theoretically is a point of first importance for Hobbes' position—to speak of a claim in justice against the ruler is not so much untrue as it is self-contradictory and absurd. Justice is a creation of law, and therefore cannot assert itself against the source of all law. In strictness a man does an unjust act only when he violates a covenant into which he has himself entered voluntarily; and the covenant which renders society possible is one which he makes not with the ruler, but with his fellow subjects. The sovereign is simply the recipient of the power handed over to him, in return for which he makes no promises whatever; indeed, how should any promise from him be more than an empty breath, since by hypothesis there is no superior force above him to provide a sanction. His subjects simply agree with one another to endow him with sovereign power for purposes they find desirable in their own interests. They create, that is, a power above the law whose will thereupon itself becomes the law; and since law must be in existence before it can be unjustly violated, the sovereign's will alone can determine what shall be called just and what unjust. Or, from another angle, no citizen has the right to complain against any act of his sovereign, be it what it may, since of his own free will he has made the sovereign his mouthpiece; and whatever the sovereign wills, accordingly, he has already in advance agreed to, even though it be the loss of his own property or his very life.

And if it be asked how the covenant can give the sovereign a right with no corresponding obligations, the answer is that it does not in the strict sense give him any right. It simply leaves him in possession of the right which he had by nature, but which his subjects have for themselves voluntarily abandoned. For it is necessary to keep always in mind the difference between right, and law or obligation.[2] Law implies force and can exist only when a sovereign force

[2] *Leviathan,* Chs. xiv, xv.

exists—that is, in the political state. But right is the privilege nature gives a man to do whatever is needful for his own self-preservation; and in the state of nature each man's right is therefore unlimited. It is only because his right is canceled in practice by the right of every other man to the same unrestricted liberty that reason calls on him to give up such unlimited claims and enter into civil society. But also the same desirable purpose necessitates that in one case the natural right which the possession of power gives should be retained unchanged, since only thus has the sovereign that ability to keep the peace which is the state's justification. In a sense the sovereign has duties toward his subjects, under the law of God or of nature. Reason tells him that he ought for his own sake to act for the good of his country and its citizens, since it is only a prosperous and happy country that makes a prosperous and powerful monarch.[3] But while he is a fool if he acts contrary to these precepts, and will very likely pay the penalty of his folly, his subjects, whatever damage they may receive from him, have no ground for claiming a legal injury or for speaking of his actions as unjust, because they have themselves forestalled such a ground of complaint by agreeing beforehand that whatever the sovereign does he does by their own authority.

The practical conclusion which Hobbes wishes to draw from this reasoning is that rebellion against any existing government is never justified. It cannot be justified legally, because the sovereign is himself the source of law. It cannot be justified by natural rights which the subject possesses—to life, liberty, property—because the very possibility of the proper exercise of sovereignty implies that the subject has freely signed these natural rights away. That this doctrine may sometimes seem a hard one Hobbes does not deny. But he insists that the alternative involves consequences that are far worse. By setting up private claims

[3] *Ibid.*, Chs. xix, xxx.

of any sort against the sovereign, the citizen is annulling the covenant on which all civil society rests and plunging men back into a state of unrestricted warfare; and any minor evil is preferable to this universal calamity. Nor is Hobbes, of course, without some empirical ground for such a judgment. It is still a stock argument against revolution that even serious grievances, especially in case they happen not to be our own, will better be endured rather than risk the chance of greater evils such as the resort to violence incurs.

3. Furthermore, the power of the sovereign extends not merely to acts but to beliefs as well; and this calls attention to an aspect of Hobbes' teaching so important as to deserve consideration by itself. The main occasion for the civil unrest of Hobbes' own day was to be found in matters of religion. Here he had to meet two different claims, both of them representing very live issues at the moment. On the one hand was the Catholic philosophy which subordinated the secular authority to the ecclesiastical or spiritual. On the other was the exaltation of the claims of the individual conscience, and the assertion of a right to disobey the civil authority when it came in conflict with one's understanding of divine commands. Hobbes had to tread cautiously here; for he could not hope to put across any theory which flouted the accepted notions of the authority of the Scriptures. He accordingly sets out to reconcile his doctrine of sovereignty, against Catholic and Presbyterian alike, with the claims of Christianity and the Bible. The way in which he accomplishes this has at the present day little interest except for the sheer ingenuity it displays; but it is too central a part of his task to be left unnoticed.

Hobbes' theology runs in brief as follows: God chose one particular nation, the Jewish nation, to which he stood in the special relationship of king through directly chosen representatives. He also promised a future world-wide kingdom over which his Son should reign. Christ's mis-

sion was to proclaim himself the lord of this coming kingdom, and to set up a church which, through the instrumentality of preaching, should prepare the world for its arrival.

But Hobbes argues that, according to the Scriptures, such a church has no authority whatever as against the secular power. All men are, indeed, subject to the divine law. But this law is the natural law of reason, which, as has been seen, places the supreme authority in the secular ruler; and so far is it from being abrogated by the Christian dispensation that it is expressly reaffirmed. Two requirements, and only two, are set up by Christ as necessary to salvation—faith in his own person, and obedience; and this last means obedience to duly constituted rule.[4] It is true that at times in the special history of the Jews obedience was due the priesthood; but only because the priests were the civil rulers as well. It is also true that the time will come when God will through his Son assume directly the reins of government. But the kingdom of heaven is not to be established until Christ comes the second time; and meanwhile he leaves men, as before, under obligation to their earthly rulers. The Church has, therefore, at the present time no political authority whatever; it has only the task of persuasion and counsel.

In answer to the defender of conscience as the supreme authority Hobbes goes even further. To allow to every Tom, Dick, and Harry the right to settle for himself the doctrines of religion is to open up an interminable possibility of unrest and disaffection, especially in view of the fact that what men really mean in claiming liberty of conscience is the right to force everybody else to accept their own beliefs.[5] Religion is too potentially dangerous a subject to be in the hands of anyone save the lawful sovereign. It may be replied to this that reason cannot require

[4] Ch. xliii.
[5] *De Corpore Politico,* Pt. II, Ch. vi, 13.

me to place the word of man before the word of God, when to do so will endanger my eternal welfare. But what *is* the word of God? And what is it that is needed for salvation? To say that each man's conscience here is final is to put ourselves at the mercy of every ignoramus or fanatic or liar who sees fit to claim that he is inspired by God. To be sure, we have the Bible. But who is to determine what constitutes the canonical Scriptures, and how they are to be interpreted after we have got them? Only some earthly authority. No such authority exists, however, save the Church; and the Church has no existence, as an organic whole, except as it is an expression of the nation, whose lawful head can be no other than the civil sovereign if we are to escape a conflict of authority fatal to the entire purpose of political society. The only one, therefore, who has the right to determine authoritatively what is to be accepted as religion is the sovereign.

As for the risk of being damned, it has appeared already that there are only two things essential to salvation; and one of these is just that submission to the civil ruler which the defender of conscience is trying to evade. The other is that Christ is the Messiah, who will return to set up a kingdom of God on earth. But if necessary faith is made to attach to this article alone, rather than to the elaborate creeds by which men gratify their intellectual vanity in seeking to impose their fancies on other men, Hobbes has little expectation that trouble will arise with the civil powers. There is, to be sure, just a chance that even this fundamental tenet the sovereign might endeavor to proscribe; and Hobbes' treatment of such a possibility is highly characteristic. We must of course, Hobbes as a religious man replies, believe the forbidden doctrine. But the law of nature gives the sovereign no control over our inner thoughts, which lie beyond his reach. Consequently we are not called upon to disbelieve, but only to conform. And if there be any sin in confessing with our lips what our heart

denies, it is the sin of the sovereign and not our own; the king is the real author of the words, and God will hold us guiltless. To object to so slight a sacrifice is to betray an uneasy itch for martyrdom.[6]

It follows that it is a right of the sovereign—indeed it is one of his most sacred duties—to censor vigorously expressions of private opinion and see to it that safe views—views that do not call in question in any way the absoluteness of civil authority—are alone taught to impressionable youth.[7] Freedom of thought and of the press, no more than freedom of conscience, is compatible with that peace and security at which the social covenant aims, and which is endangered by the license and confusion bound to arise if each man is allowed to decide for himself things that may affect the social interest. The competent and scientific thinker is, once more, at liberty in the privacy of his own thoughts to believe whatever reason dictates. But what it is proper for him to express is for the king to judge. Hobbes reconciled himself more easily to this invasion of scientific liberty, in which naturally he took more interest than in religious liberty, by reason of the fact that, like most people who urge that opinions be regulated by authority, he undoubtedly contemplated that his own opinions would be among those which the sovereign would not be tempted to suppress; indeed he hopes to see them supplant the doctrines of Aristotle in the universities, as the accepted creed of an enlightened monarch.[8]

4. There is no great trouble, now that absolutism in government has lost its traditional prestige, in seeing in a general way where the weak points of Hobbes' reasoning lie; at the same time these weaknesses are still so prevalent that it is not entirely a waste of time to notice some of them. The shortest method will be to start from an instance in particular. Hobbes argues that even the worst abuses of tyranny ought to be borne with patience, since

[6] *Ibid.*, Chs. xlii, xliii. [7] Chs. xviii, xxix, xxx. [8] Ch. xxxi.

the alternative is a return to the state of nature, and so to evils vastly more intolerable. What is the reason why this argument no longer seems particularly weighty?

An answer to this question calls attention in the first place to Hobbes' methodology. This has two main aspects. On the one hand a true proposition must rest on actual sense data—facts and sequences of experience. To these we assign a mark or name; and any word which cannot call up concretely experienced facts is nonsensical and meaningless. The starting-point of all scientific thinking is thus accurate definition, as against the prevalent habit of using words loosely in a sense that is ambiguous, or metaphorical, or simply taken over on trust from common usage without any clear notion of what they mean at all. In the next place reasoning, or science, consists in bringing these terms into connection in the form of propositions, which become scientifically valid according to the degree of consistency with which they explicate the meaning of the terms. Science is, accordingly, a matter wholly of names, or of extracting from accurately defined terms their necessary consequences. Thus in political science we start by defining justice in terms of law, and law in terms of a covenant backed by adequate force, and then go on to consider what it is that a consistent holding to these definitions compels us logically to say about the problems of justice in detail.

The value of such a method is far from negligible. Even if the definitions prove to be inadequate and crude, it nevertheless will pay us to follow them out and see where logically they lead. This has always been one of the fruitful sources of advance, more particularly in the sciences that deal with human life; and it explains why thinkers of an exacting logical conscience have had such an important place in the history of thought. Next to the rare thinker with a genuinely new and fertile idea to express, the greatest influence in philosophy has always been exerted by the man who can arouse the excited antagonism of his fellows

by following a chain of logic to a paradoxical conclusion stated so forcefully that it cannot be ignored; in some ways his influence is even more general, since he starts many minds thinking which discipleship might have atrophied. And in Hobbes' case the method has less apparent unreality than it is apt to show, since there is one central aspect of his problem where it is approximately adequate. Although there may be a practical utility in setting up an "economic man" as a tool for ordering a group of facts which otherwise would be too complex to be manageable, few people now imagine that this corresponds to any reality in the concrete. But there *is* a relatively separate group of facts in human life to which Hobbes' analysis applies. The science of law, to a very great extent, still uses what is essentially Hobbes' method; it is largely concerned with defining its terms exactly, and then working out the logical consequences of these definitions. Actually, of course, it does not entirely escape the taint of fresh experience. But its firm intention is, as its emphasis on precedent shows, to aim first of all at verbal consistency, while assuming its definitions to be already sufficiently precise. And since right and justice have their most clearly defined meaning in terms of law, Hobbes has here a point of contact with everyday usage and opinion which is absent in most similar applications of the method. Hobbes' plan may thus be described as an attempt at a legalistic theory of morals and of politics which aims at two main objects—to set forth the internal connections and corollaries of a legal theory, and to give legalism itself a foundation in the ultimate facts of human nature. It is with the second and more fundamental of these purposes that we are here chiefly concerned.

And there are points in such an enterprise that may very well be called in question. Legalism, in spite of what lawyers are tempted to suppose, is obviously not the whole of human conduct, or the only working human motive. Hobbes has said that if the supremacy of the ultimate power

that gives effect to law is once challenged, anarchy will follow; and as a matter of pure logic this may seem to be the case. In so far as public order depends on law, there must in theory be some one source of law which is itself not subject to any higher law; and if this source is tampered with at a single point, the chain of legal obligation or authority is broken, and the whole edifice of society crumbles.

But in practice we are perfectly assured that no such result will happen. Hobbes—and this is the great vice of his method—overlooks the complexity of the actual situation. It is useful for certain purposes to pick out the threads of legality from the tangled skein and trace their implications. But because these have a part to play, it does not follow in the least that it is the only or even the most decisive part. Chaos is the alternative not to positive law, but to order; and there are many sources of order besides the fear of legal punishment. When kings are deposed the country does not at once revert to anarchy; custom, for one thing, still continues to rule the actions of the vast majority nearly as effectively as did soldiers and policemen. Hobbes notices the fact of custom perfunctorily, only to set it aside as unimportant, for the reason that, legally, custom cannot be recognized as having any force except as it is enacted into law by the will of the sovereign.[9] But the question is not whether it ought to have force from the lawyer's standpoint, but whether it really does have force; and it is self-evident that in reality its force is everywhere so potent as even to limit substantially the power of making effective laws. No sovereign who ever lived has possessed anything like the command of force which Hobbes' theory supposes. Theoretically he may have the legal right to enlist the entire power of the community. But actually this power is at his disposal only in so far as it is not limited by habit, tradition, the sense

[9] Ch. xxvi.

of justice, the recognition of individual or associated interests, and the like. And until everyone has been converted to Hobbism, man's common sense will tell him that the practical desirability of overlooking abuses of power by the sovereign will inevitably, and reasonably, be affected by what one judges to be the actual amount of force at the sovereign's disposal.

So of the argument that in case any check whatsoever is allowed to the sovereign's power, there is nothing to stop the process short of complete anarchy. In a similar fashion it is often argued at the present day that the public ownership of some utility ought to be opposed because it is a step in the direction of complete socialism. The argument is only effective when we elect to exclude from our minds all the more concrete considerations that govern actual political reasoning and confine ourselves to an abstract logic; in both instances it is overlooked that men generally are not, like lawyers, given to doctrinaire reasoning, and that a precedent is in slight danger of being carried to its ultimate logical issue regardless of the concrete advantages and risks that show themselves in experience as each new step is taken.

Hobbes' position does not need to be denied all weight. Always some modicum of risk does attach to change of any sort; we cannot tell precisely what will come of it. And accordingly to strengthen the hands of those who are interested in keeping things unchanged, in order that we may take no chance of throwing away the assured blessings of public security in the interest of more problematic gains, will seem to many people, as it did to Hobbes, the only "rational" philosophy. But this suggests still another weak point in his argument.

For Hobbes—who here is reading his own proclivities into the human race—the one rational principle of life is "safety first." He assumes explicitly that all that a man has he

will give for his life, and so he invariably will choose, in so far as he is a reasonable being, the line of conduct which reduces the element of danger to a minimum. But this is a questionable view of human nature; and what is more, Hobbes' own reasoning carries an admission of the fact. His picture of the state of nature implies on the whole a very different conception of the springs of human conduct. Here ruthless aggressiveness, overweening ambition, rule unchecked.[10] It is true he sometimes talks as if the root of this was simply fear, and as if men acted to enslave and despoil their fellows only from a foreknowledge of the fact that they must anticipate others for their own self-preservation. But a group of men all swayed primarily by such a motive would have tried first some less extreme way of coming to a *modus vivendi.* And as a matter of fact, as Hobbes' account of the state of nature everywhere implies, the greatest danger to the social life comes not from timid but canny souls who aim at dominion merely to protect themselves against neighbors as timid as themselves; it comes from the irrational, impulsive, positive lust for power and pleasure and honor by which some of them, at least, are driven. In that case, however, he has left without a sufficient motive for entering into the social compact precisely those who are the chief obstacles to security—the adventurous, the ambitious, the unscrupulous, in whom the motive of farsighted timidity is conspicuously lacking. And if it is true that courage, ambition, and the readiness to take a sporting chance are an important part of human nature, and the part chiefly responsible for the way the world actually is run, it follows that even for those who desire peace and quiet first of all the claims of a passive submission to authority are weakened. Where everyone is able to anticipate with confidence that all alike will yield peaceably to orders, absolute sovereignty may have a chance.

[10] *Cf. De Corpore Politico,* I, i, 3-5.

But the more precarious such a result is rendered by facts of human nature, the less compulsion Hobbes' reasoning ought rationally to carry.

5. In the remarks that have just preceded, a point has emerged which is worthy of some attention on its own account. There are two pictures of human nature which Hobbes presents to us, not obviously consistent with one another. And the discrepancy needs to be kept in mind in turning now to the more distinctively ethical aspects of his philosophy.

Enough has been said already to suggest the need of qualifying to some extent the characterization of Hobbes' ethics as a "selfish" theory. The sharp separation of the state of nature from the social state conveys a first impression that is apt to be misleading; one may easily infer at times that for Hobbes the state of universal war reveals man's real nature, and that life within society is merely an artificial contrivance rendered necessary by the impracticability of living as one naturally would choose to live. But this is in part at least a consequence of putting in terms of history what is at bottom a logical analysis of his problem; in reality the whole outcome goes to show that man is thoroughly, and even oppressively, a social being. The "state of nature" does not stand for "human nature"; Hobbes' whole thesis is that there are certain facts of human nature that supply a permanent and solid foundation for the state. Consequently when he tells us that morality and justice lay no obligation on a man in the state of nature, since no law as yet exists for man to violate, we do not need to interpret him as meaning anything derogatory to justice; he may rather be intending to assert —a perfectly orthodox doctrine at the present day—that morality attaches to man only *in so far as* he is a social being, which is in effect to magnify the social state rather than detract from its moral claims. The really serious

point against Hobbes is the doubt whether he does not go too far in identifying morality with the "social," and so fail to leave enough free play to man for meeting the requirements of a genuinely good life. By identifying "conscience" with the settled opinion that, after one has once transferred his right of judging to another, whatever is commanded him is no less his own judgment than the judgment of that other, so that in obedience to the laws he still acts according to his own conscience, the state has been given too great rather than too small a part to play in the moral experience.[11]

Of course to Hobbes' particular reading of the social basis of morality it can still be objected that, when he makes the law that constitutes morality identical with the civil law, he is after all giving it just the artificial coloring that men are trying to avoid when they speak of moral good as "natural." But whatever the element of truth in this objection, here also qualifications must not be overlooked. It is necessary to recall again Hobbes' central problem. It is government, not morality, he is primarily investigating; and no legal requirement can safely rest on motives that are naturally weak and fluctuating, or that vary greatly with different persons. It has to make its chief appeal to forces that can be counted on to affect the most recalcitrant; even though the wicked were fewer than the righteous, yet because we cannot distinguish them with certainty we are compelled to suspect everyone alike, and treat all as potential lawbreakers.[12] From this standpoint Hobbes' selfish theory could readily be matched by utterances from the most respectable sources, when the possibility is suggested of injecting ideal or unselfish motives into the realm of international issues or of industry; it is taken very generally as a truism that plans of reform are bound to fail which do not cater to the self-interest of nations or of

[11] *Ibid.*, II, vi, 12.

[12] *De Cive,* Preface.

business men. The economic man, in particular, is in all essential respects identical with Hobbes' natural man; and the thoroughgoing selfishness of human nature was never proclaimed by him with more unction than it is to-day by orthodox economists and apologists for the existing industrial order. Hobbes, as there will be occasion to notice later, never asserts that all men are natural tyrants, or denies the existence of more amiable qualities that make for peace and friendliness; he clearly indicates his opinion that individuals may be found who are reasonable, modest, and fair-minded, content with equality without striving after lordship. But his argument is that so long as other individuals exist who are not thus reasonable in their aims, their conduct will set the problems that social theory has chiefly to resolve. It is no advantage to me to agree to live in peace with my next door neighbor if some less scrupulous person from the next street is left at liberty to plunder and abuse us both; and accordingly institutions have to be made to stand the strain upon their weakest point.

For the lawmaker this means that punishment, or an appeal to fear, is the dominating social motive. But it also means that in the absence of effective civil restraint the ordinary rules of social morality do not apply. Just as, when two nations are at war, no one thinks of laws against killing and plundering as still in force, so if the absence of government leaves men at liberty to do to me anything they have the will and power to do, I am no longer restrained by moral rules from defending myself in any way I can. Against a thug or a burglar actions are justified which the ordinary precepts of morality would forbid. One would only be doing here, less effectively, what the law itself sets out to do; and it would appear an unnecessarily superstitious regard for law which would deny to individuals the right to use the same weapons that the law makes use of, and for the same purpose, when the law itself is non-existent. Prior to

society the law of nature still has a certain force, but only in the sense of a will or readiness to carry out its requirements when it is safe to do so.[13]

In the second place, it needs to be remembered that if selfishness is the keynote of Hobbes' theory, at least it is *enlightened* selfishness; and the outcome of his enlightened selfishness is, again, not especially unorthodox. The outcry against Hobbes hardly did justice to the fact that it is mainly in the reasons he gives for his conclusions that he differs appreciably from the accepted philosophies, not in the conclusions themselves. These last will for the most part appear sufficiently conventional, so long as we remember that it is civil society, and not the state of nature, that represents the true condition of man and the proper field of ethics. To say nothing of Hobbes' exaggerated respect for law-abidingness, a philosophy can hardly be accused of immorality which deduces from the law of nature such principles as that a man should perform contracts and keep trust, should suffer no one to be the worse for him who has been first in doing a good turn, should render himself useful to others, inflict punishment with an eye not to the evil past but to a future good, express no hate or scorn of others, forgive the offender who repents and asks his pardon, account every man the equal by nature of another, avoid habits that weaken the natural faculties, and, in general, should do to others nothing which he would not have done to himself.[14] It must be noticed, too, that as a political philosophy enlightened selfishness is a thoroughly utilitarian doctrine; and in spite of its defense of autocracy, it really undermines the current view—a mixture of unthinking sentiment and of reverence for precedent—which found the source of government in the divine right of legitimated dynasties. What it justifies is existing government as such

[13] *De Corpore Politico,* I, iv, 10.
[14] *Cf. De Cive,* Ch. iii; *Leviathan,* Ch. xv.

rather than any particular form of government, much less some bygone form regardless of its present ability to effect the end which the state is meant to serve.

Nor is it to be overlooked that, in spite of certain appearances to the contrary, Hobbes' argument really amounts to a repudiation of the dangerous philosophy that might makes right. He tells us, to be sure, that physical power gives a man in the state of nature the right to whatever he can get and keep, just as it is the omnipotence of God that grounds his right to universal dominion. But such right does not constitute a claim in justice. Right represents the crude and primitive demands of human nature, justice its sophisticated and rational demands; and when justice appears, mere brute force loses its preëminence. Force is, indeed, a rational ground of obligation, in that reason tells us not to resist overwhelming power. But in a deeper sense a man is bound by the need laid upon him that, as a rational being, he should not play the fool, should not contradict himself, and, after adopting a method of self-preservation, then go on to render it futile by acts inconsistent with it.[15] More explicitly, there are two aspects of obligation. The sanction comes from law, which compels him through fear of punishment; and this is the legal sense of duty. But behind the law is the rational or prudential obligation to perform for his promise's sake those contracts to which he has committed himself, because he sees that they are the only available means in nature of attaining the security which his self-interest demands.[16]

And even Hobbes' submergence of the claims of social sentiment as a political motive is by no means so hard to justify as some of his later critics assumed. The present generation can recognize in his position a larger measure of truth than the more sentimental temper of the eighteenth century, or of the Victorian era, was prepared to grant. Philanthropy and reform are coming to see more clearly the

[15] Ch. xiv.

[16] *De Cive,* Ch. xiv, 2, note.

advantage of enlisting self-interest for the attainment of those desirable ends which moral exhortation has so far proved strikingly incompetent to secure. Thus international peace has been preached for many years without eminent success; it is only as an object lesson has begun to open men's eyes to the practical rewards of mutual agreement that world peace has become in any sense a real working hypothesis. In the same way social reforms have already passed from the stage where the superior classes are exhorted to be kind to their inferiors, to a recognition of the reality of class interests and the need to reconcile them if permanent peace is to be obtained. To this outcome it is even possible that the familiar appeals to sentiment may act as in some degree a hindrance, since it is more or less inevitable that the natural alliance between sentiment and prejudice should interfere with clarity of thinking.

But after saying all there is to be said in favor of Hobbes' thesis, some doubt will still remain as to whether he has given it the interpretation from which its advantages can most safely be expected. While it is possible to sympathize largely with his preference for a clear-sighted vision of where our real interests lie, as against a reliance on humanitarianism or religious fervor, it is also true that in his hands self-interest does have too close a resemblance psychologically to selfishness to be perfectly convincing. And it is on this psychological issue that the main controversy in connection with Hobbes' ethical philosophy turns, rather than in connection with any thoroughgoing opposition between man and society—an opposition which it is one of his merits to have helped to supersede.

6. It is not entirely easy to place Hobbes unqualifiedly on one side or the other of this controversy. It has been seen that his political philosophy leaves the point ambiguous. Self-preservation is *prima facie* a selfish good, which in the state of nature is a prolific source of evils; still, if the state of nature is primarily a theoretical deduc-

tion rather than an historical reality, then self-preservation in the social state, where it issues in a social order that insures the good of everyone alike, is not so readily to be characterized as exclusive and individualistic. On the other hand, while for political theory the "natural" man may be for all essential purposes an unreal abstraction, the same thing will hardly apply to Hobbes' psychology, where he is obviously thinking of something very different from the logical conditions of a pre-social and possibly non-existent age. Here, with a half-malicious pleasure, and certainly with an honest attempt at realism, he is drawing the portrait of his actual friends and acquaintances; the "natural" man stands for a fact not done away with by the creation of the civil state, but still very much in evidence.

It is from this latter source that the impression of a self-centered individualism chiefly takes its rise. The point of Hobbes' psychological analysis is invariably that the reputable qualities and virtues are in truth not disinterested, but only in appearance have in view a good that is located outside the agent. Thus pity, or grief for the calamity of others, arises from the imagination that the like calamity may befall ourselves. Laughter is a "sudden glory" caused either by some sudden act of our own that pleases us, or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another by comparison whereof we suddenly applaud ourselves. The value or worth of a man is his "price," or what would be given by another for the use of his power; honor or dishonor are the manifestations of this value, or the "opinion of power," whether just or unjust makes no difference. The "social" character of man in which philosophers had professed to find the origin of society has no existence. We seek society not for its own sake, but that we may receive some honor or profit by it. Men meet in the market-place for competition, not for love; and the true delights of social gatherings are equally self-interested —to joke at the expense of others, run down the absent,

talk about ourselves, and show off our wit or learning. All the mind's pleasure is either glory or refers to glory in the end; and the rest is pleasure of the senses.[17]

The deficiencies of such a psychology of human motives are sufficiently apparent not to need detailed criticism at the present day; indeed they are so evident that we may overlook its merits. Every open-minded man must be aware that Hobbes' analysis contains an unpleasantly large element of truth; and a readiness to turn one's eyes away from this has been the source of much hazy thinking, which constitutes a real danger to the effectiveness of the ethical life. Furthermore, whatever its shortcomings, it does mark an attempt, and up to a point a significant attempt, to put the theory of human nature on a scientific basis. This basis is definitely physiological; it goes back to primitive movements of appetite or desire and aversion—the expansive and contractile motions on which life depends. The objects of desire and aversion we are also said to love or hate, desire and love being one and the same thing, save that by desire we always signify the absence of the object and by love most commonly its presence. Similarly such objects constitute what men call "good" or "evil." The sense or appearance of appetite is pleasure, of aversion pain; or when they arise from a mental expectation of future consequences they are known as joy and grief. Out of the above simple passions all the other and more complex emotions are derivable. Thus appetite with an opinion of attaining is called hope; aversion with an opinion of hurt from the object, fear; aversion with hope of avoiding that hurt by resistance, courage; sudden courage, anger; grief for the discovery of some defect of ability, shame; and the like.[18] Whatever we may think of the details of this analysis, in its essentials it is a real contribution to an understanding of the life of conduct.

[17] *Leviathan,* Chs. vi, x; *De Cive,* Ch. i, 2.
[18] *Leviathan,* Ch. vi.

Meanwhile before accepting the more obvious implications of Hobbes' psychology as complete and final even from his own point of view, qualifying considerations have once more to be taken into account. It is still possible that an interest in the motives that have to be brought to bear on men to safeguard legal and political ends has led him to assign a more exclusive rôle to selfishness than otherwise he might have done; and as a matter of fact this is what he seems himself to allow. There is no apparent way of reconciling a thoroughgoing selfish view of human nature with the admissions to which reference has been already made—admissions that men exist here and there, at least, of a "certain nobleness or gallantness of courage" by which they will "scorn to be beholden for the contentment of their lives to fraud or breach of promise"; men who are really kindly and generous and sociable in disposition, and who would respect their neighbors' rights voluntarily were they sure that such conduct would not be fatal to themselves.[19] In particular, Hobbes' evident faith in the existence of a human predisposition toward rationality, which constitutes the logical backbone of the compulsion that justice exercises on the mind, is something which would seem to be distinguishable, and separable, from the selfish practical interests that reason serves. Facts of this sort are hard to find a place for except as we suppose that Hobbes is really concerned at bottom to deny, not the existence of disinterested motives, but only their ability when taken by themselves to hold society together. And as a consequence, the difficulty of characterizing his thesis unambiguously holds of its psychological as well as of its political side.

7. And there is one additional aspect of the situation which still further complicates the straightforwardness of Hobbes' philosophy and suggests that his real ethical opinion is less closely tied to his political program than he

[19] *Ibid.*, Chs. xv, xxvii; *De Cive,* Chs. i, 4; iii, 5; *De Corpore Politico,* I, i, 3-5; I, iii, 4.

usually leads us to suppose. Before considering this it may be useful first to restate the larger logic of his position. Our natural tendency to take the assertion that morality and justice do not constrain man in his original state as if it meant that morality is a purely artificial product, does injustice, as has been seen, to Hobbes' real intentions. As a code of conduct we are under no obligations to practice morality when it would defeat its own underlying purpose. Nevertheless it does have a purpose, grounded not in artifice but in permanent principles of reason. It represents the only way in which, as things are constituted, man can attain the end of his being; and therefore it is bound to be recognized by him in so far as he is a rational creature.[20] Hobbes, that is, does not deny the rational basis of morality; what he denies is that the element in morality which takes the form of duty or constraint is the thing that is most ultimate for understanding it. In other words, the conception of "duty" is subordinate to the conception of the "good"; duty is justified by the fact that it helps us to attain the good, and loses its compulsion when it ceases to perform its office. It follows that the distinctively ethical core of Hobbes' reasoning must be looked for in his notion of the end that determines human good, and that leads us to accept certain rules of conduct as logically necessary to its attainment.

Now there are several terms which Hobbes makes use of to express the nature of the ultimate human end or good. One of these—pleasure—is plainly secondary. The definition of pleasure as the sense or "appearance" of an expansive movement toward a satisfying object is enough to show that it is logically subordinate. Hobbes cannot in strictness even hold, with Aristotle, that pleasure is a "superadded perfection"; for his own philosophy is explicitly materialistic, and feeling, in consequence, is not a product or accompaniment of physical motion, but *is* a particular form of

[20] *Cf. Leviathan,* Chs. xiv, xv (end), xxx.

motion and nothing more. Such statements as seem to point to hedonism will therefore need to be discounted as inexact and popular expressions.

There remain two other ways in which he is accustomed to characterize the essence of that human nature from which political and ethical conclusions take their rise—as a desire for *self-preservation,* and as a desire for *power.* In his theory of the state it is chiefly the former of which he makes use; power is not a word he ordinarily chooses to employ when he is speaking of the political life, where the desire for power is an acute source of danger. If we are to select a single term, accordingly, self-preservation probably comes nearest on most occasions to Hobbes' meaning.

Nevertheless, even as a political motive, self-preservation has a more positive content than might appear. The primary end of the state is, indeed, security of life in its most literal sense, since without security no good of any sort is possible; to it every other form of good must in case of necessity be subordinated, and to seek peace may therefore be called the fundamental law of nature. But Hobbes evidently presumes, and occasionally says, that the state is not really performing its service adequately except as it leaves room for more expansive forms of human activity as well, such as man requires for his true satisfaction.[21]

And when it is in terms of psychology, instead, that he is chiefly thinking, his picture of the "natural" man is, as has already been observed, often very far from the anemic view of human nature which serves him as a political philosopher. Here man appears as an aggressive animal governed by fierce passions, bent on achievement and a full and vigorous life, and ambitious for the "glory" derived from outstripping and outshining his fellows.[22] And in this last emphasis there lies the possibility of an ethical point of view more congenial to the modern mind, and one that might obviate

[21] *Ibid.,* Ch. xxx; *De Cive,* Ch. xiii, 4.
[22] *Leviathan,* Chs. xi, xiii, xvii.

some of the objections brought against Hobbes' doctrine. If we take the notion of fulness of life in terms of impulse and desire as the true account of essential human nature, there is no particular difficulty, as the classical ethical theories had already shown, in avoiding a hard-and-fast conflict between selfishness and disinterestedness. The commonest sorts of experience will indicate that men may reap the reward that comes from self-expression through acts whose bearing on the private self is so indirect as practically to lie outside the field of consciousness. And the term "power," as standing for inner vitality and energy, and for a control over the conditions that make successful activity possible, is in some respects not a bad way of expressing this, though it is ambiguous and needs careful explanation.

But if Hobbes suggests the possibility of such an ethical point of view as this, it is not one that he himself makes any real move to carry out. The strength of his political reasoning depends in the end on the simplification of human nature to a desire for self-preservation in the narrow sense, with fear as the dominating human motive. And even when he gravitates to a more adequate conception, he still continues to think of power in individualistic terms, and to transform all the more generous constituents of human nature into mere instruments of personal glory. Indeed his conception of scientific method renders such a result almost unavoidable. Logically Hobbes' selfish theory is bound up with the fact that science takes with him the form of physiology and physics, rather than of the larger, and still unborn, science of biology. To-day it is universally recognized that the scientific basis of the social life lies in the fact that the individual organism does not find its explanation in the bare laws of physics applied to a particular animal structure, but reaches out to include in a sense the species also, and, ultimately, the entire physical environment, in so far as this supplies the conditions on which the evolution and maintenance of the species depend. But to

this Hobbes is blind. For him a science of man deals with the preservation or enlargement of the separate organism. And while in this a truth undoubtedly is present of which "social" theories often make too little, it nevertheless has an unhappy tendency to commit the ethical thinker to a narrow view of original human nature, to which then a social character has to be added as a more or less artificial appendage.

It remains to notice one further way in which, even more decisively, Hobbes fails to realize possibilities inherent in his psychological foundations. The natural logic of a human nature conceived in terms of power would be to emphasize the importance for a satisfying life of liberty, spontaneous self-expression, the free exercise of natural impulse; and in man's primitive state, accordingly, we do find liberty ruling supreme, as an entire absence of restraint. But here again Hobbes is handicapped by the tendency of his formula to overplay the historical separation between nature and reason; and the excess of liberty from which he starts is corrected by an equally extreme disposition to ignore its claims where social man is involved. In this case, also, it would be easy to do him some injustice. What he is really arguing for is the need of a sovereign power *capable* of overbearing all resistance in emergencies, and not the desirability of exercising this power under ordinary circumstances to discourage human activity and initiative. In a way he recognizes explicitly the worth of liberty, in the form of a principle that legal prohibitions are not to be extended beyond the actual needs of public order; laws, as he once remarks, are not invented to take away, but to direct man's actions.[23] Nevertheless this with him is very incidental. The main drift of his argument leads him continually to undervalue spontaneity as compared with social restraint; and in order to get a firmer basis for his political logic his psychological empiricism is thus divorced from much of the suggestiveness it might otherwise have had.

[23] *De Cive,* Ch. xiii, 15; *De Corpore Politico,* II, ix, 4.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN NATURALISM (*continued*)

SPINOZA

1. IT is not altogether easy to decide on the most profitable angle from which to approach Hobbes' greatest contemporary. Spinoza's *Ethics,* like Plato's *Republic,* covers nearly every large aspect of philosophy—religion, science, and psychology, as well as ethics in the narrow sense; and unlike the *Republic* it brings these together into an extraordinarily close-knit piece of reasoning—in some respects without parallel in the history of human thinking—whose full force requires that it be reproduced almost as a whole. It will be advisable to make no attempt at this, but, instead of trying to characterize the outcome as a piece of deduction primarily, to consider it in its character as a concrete practical ideal of human living. This is as a matter of fact Spinoza's own central interest; and probably it offers, therefore, the most illuminating single point of view for regarding even his technical philosophy. Such a task has itself its very considerable difficulties and complications. Spinoza's ideal is one of the great permanent self-expressions of the human spirit, and it could not have won its place were it not that, from the inside, it stands for a relatively immediate and simple value. Nevertheless it touches previous philosophy on so many sides that to set it forth in conceptual language calls for numerous distinctions and explanations. It has points of contact, positive or negative, with nearly all the great historical systems, combining them into a new pattern by an alchemy of its own; and this

necessarily makes the task of exposition somewhat tortuous.

Perhaps the most suitable starting-point will be found in the contemporary naturalism of Hobbes, by whom Spinoza was influenced in important ways. More explicitly, Spinoza may be approached in the first place from the standpoint of those possibilities involved in Hobbes' view of human nature of which we have seen that his own interest prevented him from taking full account. Up to a point the premises of the two philosophers might be put in almost identical terms. Ethically Spinoza, like Hobbes, is an individualist. The actual essence of anything lies in self-preservation or the endeavor to persist in its own being.[1] It is true that, on the other hand, Spinoza in the outcome may seem to be at the opposite extreme from individualism; he is a "God-intoxicated" man, for whom nothing has any being save the Whole. There are even times when this absolute reality, or God, threatens to obliterate all finite things and reduce them to illusion. But this is not Spinoza's intention, certainly not when he is speaking as an ethicist. The individual thing has no reality *apart* from the whole; but *in* the whole it plays its necessary and essential rôle. It is a partial expression of God's own essence, without which God would not be what he is. "To be" means "to be determinate"; if within its own precincts the finite creature did not stand in readiness to repel all invasions of its vested right to be itself and nothing else, there could be no stability anywhere in the universe. For man, accordingly, the fundamental law must be the law of his own nature, from which he cannot possibly escape; and this law presupposes desire, effort, striving. That for man is good which lends itself to an endeavor to preserve his own being or to increase his *quantum* of reality; whatever thwarts such an end is bad. Or, since the process of passing from a less to a greater degree of perfection or

[1] *Ethics,* Pt. III, Props. 6, 7; Pt. IV, Prop. 22.

of reality is pleasure, while a movement in the contrary direction is pain, a man's good may be identified with that which gives him pleasure.

Also as a consequence of this, Spinoza agrees with Hobbes' naturalism in its further and negative contention—that good and evil are human and relative conceptions merely, which have no standing in the universe at large. Reality as such is not good or bad; it simply *is*. It is only a finite part of reality, with an interest in maintaining itself in its particularity such as leads it to set up limited ends in terms of its self-preservation or its self-enlargement, for which there emerge those aspects of existence to which value terms apply. The human mind has, to be sure, a persistent disposition to turn the imagination loose upon these products of its special point of view, and to attribute to the universe its private preferences, thus making out of good and evil something absolute that rules God as well as man. But this is purely the consequent of naïveté and an ignorant self-esteem.

2. Formally, then, Spinoza's starting-point is much the same as that of Hobbes. But when we turn to its more exact interpretation, various new considerations alter substantially the outcome. For one thing, we may note the shift of emphasis from self-preservation to vigor and abundance of life. Hobbes had not been without a recognition that man needs more than merely to keep himself alive for the satisfaction of his nature. But his special political interest nevertheless leads him to minimize the need, so that the human endeavor appears commonly not as self-assertiveness, but as a cautious insurance against risk. For Spinoza, such a disposition to contract the positive demands of life in order to safeguard a bare minimum of existence seems an entire misunderstanding of man's true essence. Fear is one of the motives which ought to be eliminated rather than encouraged; it is a state of depressed vitality, and we cannot enhance life by lowering its tension.

There is another and logically even more important way in which the emphasis in Spinoza parts from that of Hobbes. It is still, to be sure, the bodily life from which ethics starts, and with which, in a sense, it ends; otherwise Spinoza's ideal would cease to be naturalistic. The first and principal endeavor of the mind is to affirm the existence of the body; and every step by which the body increases its power of action is a step toward perfection. For whatever helps or hinders this power helps or hinders also the mind's power of thinking; and it is only in proportion as the body becomes capable of many things that self-knowledge is possible.[2] For the same reason Spinoza has no good word for asceticism. It is the part of a wise man to refresh and invigorate himself with moderate and pleasant eating and drinking, with sweet scents and the beauty of green plants, with ornament, with music, with sports, with the theater; for the human body is composed of many parts of diverse nature which continually stand in need of new and varied nourishment in order that the whole of the body may be equally apt for everything which can follow from its nature, and consequently that the mind may be equally fit to understand many things at once.[3] But notwithstanding a formal measure of community, Spinoza is moving toward an issue very different from that of Hobbes. And since a good share of what is most characteristic in his doctrine is involved in this, it will be convenient to stop and consider the nature of the difference more closely.

The possibility of a new interpretation lies in Spinoza's metaphysics. Whereas Hobbes is a materialist, and finds no place in human life for anything that is not physical and bodily, for Spinoza reality has, alongside its physical aspect, another dimension in terms of mind, or spirit, or "ideas." This does not mean that man is made up of two separate elements, mind and body. Looked at in one way, in every

[2] Pt. II, Props. 13, 14, 23; Pt. III, Prop. 11; Pt. V, Prop. 39.
[3] Pt. IV, Prop. 45, Schol. 2.

detail of his nature he is a part of the physical order. Mind is not something added to the body. Rather—this is Spinoza's famous theory of parallelism—the one ultimate reality expresses itself in different attributes which, because they have their source in an identity of substance, will each in every particular mode of its existence be repeated in the other series, but which for the same reason cannot interfere with each other's continuity, or interact. A physical change can be understood only through other changes in the physical series, a change of ideas only by reference to other ideas. At the same time each series throws light on the other in a way, since what I know as a movement of the body is always capable of being translated into the medium of ideas; while every idea is the idea of a bodily movement, and has its counterpart in the realm of extension.

For ethics the point to be observed here is that it seems to open up a way—a way that calls, indeed, for much additional interpretation—of holding both to naturalism and to idealism without compromising either. Any aspect of life whatsoever can be expressed directly in terms of bodily motion. Body is not dependent on or subordinate to spirit; equally with spirit it is an attribute of God's nature, and whatever truth we discover about it is necessary and eternal truth. There is nothing that detracts from human dignity, accordingly, in a naturalistic reading of man's life. At the same time it is also true that man is spirit as well as body; and we therefore are at liberty, if we choose, to express the same identical set of facts in ideal terms. Both sets of statements will be equally valid; which we prefer will depend upon what our interest may be.

And Spinoza's own interest is not with body, but with spirit. Spinoza did not come to philosophy by the path of naturalistic science. His earliest concern was with religion; and the goal of knowledge he sets out to reach not for the sake of knowing merely, but as a method of salvation. Because he felt the unsatisfying character of the ends which

the natural man is wont to aim at as his good, he was driven to the quest for an absolute and unchanging good which shall never fail or disappoint us. Such a quest has its only chance of being successful through the discovery of what constitutes man's own true nature. But it is in the *consciousness* of action, in the life of *ideas,* that man comes to self-knowledge, rather than in the modes of extension through which he belongs to the physical universe. Spinoza's ethics is not, accordingly, like that of Hobbes, a naturalism pure and simple. It is an idealism which can, indeed, be read into naturalistic terms; but its definitive character nevertheless is lent to it by its idealistic superstructure. And as a consequence it opens up a problem which for Hobbes did not exist. Life cannot now be understood except as it takes account alike of the natural and of the ideal; it is no longer possible to take the natural life for granted as resting on its own merits. But for ethics we can connect the two only by finding some inner significance which they have; and this involves bringing both in a sense after all within the life of spirit.

3. In order to locate Spinoza's answer to the peculiar problem which his naturalism thus raises—the part it plays logically in an ethical ideal which as such lends itself only indirectly to naturalistic terms—it will be necessary to start again from his central interest. This can be formulated most simply as a quest for salvation through a knowledge of the "real"; "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Spinoza came to philosophy, as has just been noted, through the gateway of religion; it is hard to give any sort of real unity to his thought unless we suppose that his ultimate concern was not with science but with God. Alike in the earlier phases of his thinking, and in its final issue, the naturalistic flavor is subordinated; in the one case it is largely implicit, in the other it has been displaced by the mystical or semi-mystical sense of a real presence—the union of man with the Whole of things through which

alone he attains a permanent and satisfying good, and which is a spiritual and not a bodily consummation. Only for the process of discovering and arriving at this ultimate goal does naturalism in its ordinary meaning have a primary significance.

And such a significance is bound up with a particular character attaching to Spinoza's interpretation of "reality." The more common brand of mysticism is satisfied with knowing God in his ineffable and undifferentiated essence. Spinoza takes knowledge more seriously. The infinite is not reached by leaving behind the finite; it is, somehow, the actual, the determinate. The natural life could indeed hardly at any time have possessed, for Spinoza, a very profound value on its own account; it is too closely connected with those unsubstantial notions of the good which he starts out by rejecting. But it is there; it represents reality. It must be accepted, therefore, by anyone who really wants to know; and if it shows features that appear to be hostile to man's spiritual life, his task is not to shut his eyes to these, but to reshape his ideals so as to include them. If truth is man's goal, he must begin by accepting facts.

And right here we find, accordingly, if we ignore for the present some of its emotional overtones, the simplest possibility of characterizing the Spinozistic ideal. Briefly, it is the ideal of the free intellect, and of a salvation that comes from seeing things exactly as they are, accepting them unreservedly, and through this insight and acceptance turning even the conditions which, when they meet us in the guise of something alien, constitute human servitude, into an instrument of self-attainment. We are in bondage in so far as our conduct is determined by outside forces, and is not the expression of our own inner nature or essence; for a man to be led by things external to him is a mark of deficiency and weakness, whereas his only true good is plenitude of power and self-enlargement. In particular, this bondage takes the form of a subjection to the passions or

emotions. For the definition of a passion is that it is "passive"; in so far as we are under its influence we are acting under compulsion from forces that lie beyond us and that we do not fully understand. And Spinoza's purpose is to show how knowledge, which is man's highest goal and the substance of his life as spirit, can be used to enable him to escape from bondage and attain that independence of all save the laws of his own being in which true freedom lies.

To get the force of Spinoza's thesis, it will be useful first to turn as briefly as possible to its technical form as metaphysics. It has appeared that the one Substance, which we may call either God or Nature, has two attributes, which reveal themselves in two parallel series of finite modes—the two realms of physical events, and of "ideas." Now every mode, whether of mind or matter, can for purposes of explanation be regarded from two points of view, according as it is connected directly with ultimate existence—God—or with other finite modes of its own kind. This last is the way of ordinary experience and of the empirical sciences; any particular fact is explained by its causal relationship with some other finite fact, and this again by a further connection with something else, causal explanation thus running on forever in a series that never finds a solid resting-place. But if, instead of relating the fact to be explained to other similar facts, we could connect it with the Whole, and could see it as following with logical necessity from some central truth which itself requires no explanation because in its very being or essence it is completely and luminously rational and self-explanatory, we should then understand the fact in a different and altogether more satisfying way.

This applies, among other things, to man. Man's life is a part of the natural series of causally determined events; and in so far as he is thus influenced by external causes he is not himself the sufficient explanation of his actions. On the side of "ideas," this means that ideas so regarded are

obscure and unequal to their object. Thus sense perception, involving as it does both outer stimulus and sense organ, is a hybrid, which adequately represents neither the bodily state nor the external cause. In a similar way emotions stand for confused ideas in whose origination the body coöperates with foreign influences; and since then only is man fully active when his act follows from his own inner nature, to be subject to the emotions is to be passive and in bondage to something alien. Only as confused ideas give place to clear and adequate ones does the mind's own true and unadulterated essence come to light. And this is possible only in proportion as we pass to the form of knowledge that is intuitive and necessary, and become aware of the existence of the body no longer as a link in an infinite chain of events, but as directly an expression of the central source of all being—God. Of course it is from God that the causal series equally derives. But when viewed as causally determined, our acts are due to God not as he constitutes the essence of our own nature simply, but as he constitutes the essence of other things as well; and therefore *we* are not wholly active. In that highest form of reason, on the other hand, which views things as having a necessary implication in ultimate existence, it is our own nature solely that is involved, and not our nature in its relation to other finite things. And so to understand ourselves in this highest way, to know things as they are in God, to have clear and adequate ideas, is to cease to be passive, and to become fully and completely active.

Furthermore, since to have the source of our activity solely in ourselves, to act from the necessity of our own being and in accordance with its fundamental laws, is also to be free in the only real meaning of the term,[4] the antithesis between necessity and freedom now has disappeared. Nothing, to be sure, is free in the arbitrary sense in which men talk about "free will." The constitution of reality is

[4] Pt. I, Def. 7.

inevitably just what it is and nothing else; any persuasion that it is open to us as finite creatures arbitrarily to choose this course or that is an illusion, and due merely to the fact that we are conscious of our acts without being aware of the causes that determine them. But whereas everything in particular is necessitated, the whole is dependent on nothing but itself. And in so far as the finite being is identified with God, he also shares this freedom. To be truly free is not to be lawless, but to be bound by the lovely fetters of a love for God and his eternal laws.[5]

Through the activity of the intelligence, then, in its efforts to see things as they are and in their necessary relationships, the mind attains to freedom and happiness and increase of being. And the chief work of the intelligence is to enable man to escape from the confused ideas which we call emotions, and which, as due not to self-activity but to the influence of things external to the self, are the source of ignorance, illusion, and slavery. What now does this mean more concretely, and how is the method of salvation supposed to work?

4. To begin with, it belongs to Spinoza's naturalistic emphasis to recognize that the emotions are real parts of human nature, and not, as the Stoics had maintained, a mere disease of the mind, to be eradicated in the interest of a passionless contemplation. We are to free ourselves from the *bondage* of the emotions, not from the emotional life itself. Emotions are bad in so far as they are *passions.* But to activity also there belongs its appropriate emotional side, which constitutes an intrinsic part of the good life, and which takes on the one hand the form of strength of mind, and on the other that of nobility or generosity. Thus temperance, sobriety, presence of mind in danger, are a species of strength of mind, or of the desire by which each man endeavors to preserve his own being according to the dictate of reason alone; while moderation and mercy are

[5] *Short Treatise,* Ch. xxvi.

forms of a similar rational desire to help and to join to himself in friendship other men.[6]

In other words, what Spinoza wishes to maintain is the need of ridding life of emotional disturbances that are depressing, devitalizing, and obstructive, and of cultivating instead a cheerful and expansive mood. For pleasure and cheerfulness are *life,* while pain and sorrow mean always its diminution; and we cannot promote life by checking its exuberance. Sorrow and melancholy are always bad and work against improvement; there cannot be too much cheerfulness. We grow by fixing our minds on the possibilities of active achievement and positive good, not on evils and deficiencies. Whereas the sick man eats what he dislikes from a fear of death, a man in health enjoys his food, and in consequence he reaps more benefit from life than if he feared death and directly desired to avoid it. For this reason pity, repentence, and humility are motives to be avoided; they may have a relative justification in certain cases, but in themselves they are an evil, a lowering of vital power, a movement away from perfection. Man's good lies, rather, with the positive forces which liberate his energies and render him more fit for action. Vice is impotence, and can be cured only by new accessions of power; and power means pleasure, cheerful serenity, buoyancy.[7] It is because knowledge—and this it is important to observe if we are to interpret Spinoza's intellectualism correctly—brings us into contact with larger reaches of existence, expands the soul, and increases its power of action and enjoyment, that it constitutes a good. Knowledge is not desirable just as passionless intellect. The goal of knowledge is *self*-knowledge, or the full understanding of myself in my relations to the universe; science is trivial unless it thus relates itself to life.[8] In consequence we cannot sepa-

[6] Pt. III, Props. 58, 59.
[7] Pt. IV, Props. 42, 50, 53, 54, 63, Schol. 2.
[8] *On the Emendation of the Understanding,* p. 7 (Bohn's translation).

rate knowledge from emotion, if by emotion we understand a pleasurable sense of vital function. It should be added that if we do not in the true sense know except as knowledge is an inner urge toward self-expression, and its object, therefore, something not to be barely apprehended but to be loved as well, it follows that we cannot *really* know truth without endeavoring at the same time to realize truth in action. Knowledge and will and feeling are thus in essence one and inseparable.

In saying this, however, we are only making more evident and insistent the problem involved in Spinoza's naturalism. In opposition alike to supernaturalism, to the apathy of the Stoic sage, and to a purely metaphysical or scientific intellectualism, it is, to be sure, essential to recognize that man's good consists in an apotheosis of the natural life. Nevertheless for Spinoza this is itself an *ideal,* which stands in sharp contrast to what commonly passes for a natural view of man. What naturalism in its usual form primarily undertakes is a justification of human nature in the raw, with its apparent imperfections and crudities as a part of the physical universe.

And this is the key on which Spinoza himself also starts. It will doubtless seem to moralists generally most strange, he writes, "that I should endeavor to treat by a geometrical method the vices and follies of man, and to desire by a sure method to demonstrate those things which these people cry out against as being opposed to reason, or as being vanities, absurdities, and monstrosities. The following is my reason for doing so. Nothing happens in nature which can be attributed to any vice of nature; for she is always the same and everywhere one; . . . so that there must be one and the same method of understanding the nature of all things whatsoever, that is to say, the universal laws and rules of nature. The effects, therefore, of hatred, anger, envy, considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and virtue of nature as other individual things; they

have therefore certain causes through which they are to be understood, and certain properties which are just as worthy of being known as the properties of any other thing, in the contemplation alone of which we delight. I shall therefore . . . consider human actions and appetites just as if I were considering lines, planes, or bodies." [9] But while in the mouth of the scientist pure and simple words such as these would call for no particular comment, to the ethicist they present a difficulty. How are we to combine this refusal to pass ethical judgment on the facts of man's natural history with the acceptance of a norm which, whatever form of words we use, really condemns such facts? How shall we reconcile the denial that good and bad have any universal meaning with the assumption that they nevertheless make all the difference in the world to the happiness of a being whose goal is reality in its universal aspect? In what way is the relation to be understood between the non-moral laws of nature and the moral law to which, for his own sake, man must submit himself, and which it is Spinoza's main interest to recommend?

5. When Spinoza says that ethics must accept the facts and the laws of nature as a datum to which the terms good and evil in the human sense do not apply, and which, therefore, are not to be lauded or condemned, but are simply to be understood, there is one thing he evidently means which since his day has become a commonplace. Science is bound to presume that in its dealings with existence it has no concern with values, purpose, teleology. We are not helped to know reality by assuming that the world is made to suit our convenience or desire, or that it expresses the will of a supernatural agency; we come to know it by trying without prejudice to discover what actually it is and how it works. And only in this way shall we find a solid basis even for the conduct of human life. We do not serve our ends, even ideal ends, by repudiating the basic facts of human nature,

[9] *Ethics*, Pt. III, Preface.

ignoring what man is in the interest of what we think he ought to be, and setting the ideal over against the real as a hostile competitor. Envy and greed and lust are not got rid of by calling them bad names. There the passions are, as conditions we are forced to take into our account; and their sources can never be eradicated except by tearing up the roots of life itself. Our only chance for something better is to accept whatever we find, come to understand it as thoroughly as we can, and then enlist it in our service. Reason does not work apart from the impulses and emotions. It works *in* the emotions, which it aims not to get rid of but to transform.

The point of this comes out with special clearness in Spinoza's treatment of social man. Potentially man is a social being. But we shall only be endangering the foundations of the social state if we try to make this dependent on a purely disinterested idealism. Man cannot possibly cut loose from self-interest; if every individual thing did not aim first of all to satisfy its own particular nature, the whole determinate structure of the world would disappear. The basis of all virtue is, accordingly, the endeavor to preserve one's individual essence; even to one another men are most useful when each seeks out what is profitable to himself.[10] Practical statesmen have always recognized this; while philosophers have talked of universal good, disinterested benevolence, and absolute moral duties and ideals, the statesman has been taking man as he found him, adjusting institutions to his actual desires and motives, and availing himself of the very weaknesses and imperfections of human nature to create incentives for the establishment of a salutary social order. The greed which offends the moralist is the necessary basis of industry and thrift; ambition incites to public service, envy to useful rivalries. Everywhere men are working, and must work, to express their individual nature; good has no meaning for me unless it is primarily

[10] Pt. IV, Props. 18, 22, 35, Cor. 2.

my good, the exercise of my personal energies. At the same time the man of intelligence is certain to discover that this energy of his can secure adequate release *only* under social conditions. As subject to the passions with their short-sighted views of what is good and evil, the interests of individuals are sure to clash and so defeat themselves; aiming as they do at competitive goals, hatred and envy and destructive warfare are the inevitable outcome. Men cannot be mutually helpful except as they agree on a common end which each can enjoy without prejudice to the rest; and it is only as they are rational, and substitute the universal welfare for private and conflicting aims, that such an agreement is attainable.[11] My own power increases with every step toward coöperation that joins to it the power of other men.

All this has, it will be evident, a close affinity with Hobbes. In both cases society is a product of reason rather than the original state of man, where man's right to satisfy his natural desires is unrestricted. For both, political government is due to the failure of reason as a compelling motive, and therefore the need of using organized compulsion to educate man in the life of freedom, and insure from everyone the kind of conduct that reason dictates—a compulsion which even the well-disposed man often requires to help him overcome his irrational moods. For both, the sovereignty of the state is technically or legally supreme.[12] But while Hobbes is concerned chiefly to uphold the negative claims of safety, and so has little attention to waste on the positive demands of freedom, for Spinoza, whose interest lies in security indeed, but in security for the life of full activity rather than for bare living, it is the concrete interests of true freedom that his political scheme is devised primarily to further; and in consequence he is much more genuinely realistic and less doctrinaire than the realistic

[11] Pt. IV, Props. 32-37.
[12] *Theologico-Political Treatise,* Ch. xvi; *Political Treatise,* Ch. ii.

Hobbes. Thus in spite of maintaining the absoluteness of sovereignty in the legal sense, he does not exclude the right of revolution when government is failing to perform its task. For the right of government is coextensive with its power, which is not dependent on an abstract legal status, but on the actual force it can control; and this force inevitably is weakened in the degree in which the ruler ignores those fundamental laws of human nature which lead men to insist upon their proper good. The real authority of a government, and so its right to govern, is limited to its available power to command the obedience of its subjects, which in turn depends upon their mental attitude toward authority; and it increases in proportion as it entrenches itself in their minds and affections through being felt to be a necessary instrument for their own self-realization. For purely selfish reasons, therefore, governments should aim to secure the best life for the citizen; and as a means to this they are bound to permit as much liberty as possible, including, in particular, liberty of thought and conscience, since it is only in free and enlightened self-activity that man finds his nature satisfied.[13]

And now in terms of such a social program the value of a disinterested and realistic science of human nature may be made fairly evident. The statesman, at any rate, is able to deal most effectively with his material when he regards man neither as evil and corrupt, and so an object of loathing or of vengeance, nor as a creature of lofty ideals and unworldly virtues, but as what he plainly is—a being with natural impulses which he seeks to gratify, which through his ignorance may go astray and so need to be set right through bringing home to him the fact that in reality he is thwarting his own desire, and which in any case at the start are naïve and unenlightened, so that true freedom has to be achieved gradually through education and experience. From the point of view of dealing practically with other men

[13] *Theologico-Political Treatise,* Ch. xvii, xx.

there is, accordingly, an obvious justification—even in terms of bringing about a better and more ideal social state—for starting from the tolerant attitude of the scientific observer, and holding in check our natural readiness to pass judgment on our fellows instead of endeavoring sympathetically to understand them.

The political interest, however, is for Spinoza not the final one. What is most characteristic in his philosophy is the inner and personal aspect of the ethical process. The thing each man is most directly concerned with is his own freedom and self-enlargement, and his escape from the passions to which he is in bondage. And with this the problem involved takes on a different aspect.

6. At a certain level an answer to the problem is perhaps not particularly hard to find. Spinoza's aim is to show how a naturalistic—or at least a realistic—intelligence is the one path to an attainment of humanly desirable good; and as an empirical program, merely, this offers no great theoretical difficulty. It has appeared that freedom and necessity are not contradictory notions. We attain to freedom not in spite of the necessary laws of our being, but because of them; a man does not realize himself by following his whims and casual desires, but only by accepting the fundamental requirements of his own inner constitution which scientific knowledge uncovers. And this has its verification in experience. The destructive nature of a passion is largely due to the element of contingency or uncertainty that infects it; if we once recognize that reality cannot be altered by the human will, we shall free ourselves from uneasy hopes and fears, and from all the emotions that upset the mind and indicate its weakness and its blindness. To aim at the impossible is a sure source of perturbation and discontent. But if I once see that it *is* impossible, I no longer make myself unhappy about it; the mind accepts the inevitable, and its vain struggles cease.

Meanwhile to understand rightly the method of this

deliverance we need also to recall what has been said a few pages back. To know things as they are, to have clear and adequate ideas, is the one true end of human nature; Spinoza's whole philosophy is built about this premise. But such knowledge does not mean a bare intellectual understanding; *mere* knowledge is an abstraction and has as such no power over conduct. We cannot conquer a passion simply by the apprehension of an intellectual proposition about it; the only thing that will overcome an emotion is a stronger emotion.[14] The truth does not set us free unless we love the truth as an object of our own desire; we must enjoy the good, and not simply be aware *that* it is good. But the desire for truth is a genuine desire; in the end it is the only desire that is fully real. And by setting out deliberately to cultivate it, therefore, we have an emotional instrument which is capable of entering into competition with the passions on their own ground.

It is true we ought not to exaggerate its power. As human animals we never can escape wholly from the passions; these will be at times too strong for the mind to assuage. For in the passions we are subject to the influence of outside things; and since the power which these represent is vastly greater than our own, we cannot expect to attain the passionless self-sufficiency of the Stoic sage.[15] Nevertheless the intellect has in the long run a powerful advantage. Any object whatever may attach itself to desire, and so be loved. But the more trivial the object, and the more casual the association, the weaker naturally is its hold; while the greater reality the object of an idea possesses and the closer its connection with the mind, the more intense is our emotion toward it, and the greater the power which the idea exerts. Thus what is merely possible or probable exercises less emotional force than what is certain; and it is reason which yields us necessary truth. So while imagination is inferior to sense, because it deals with the past or

[14] Pt. IV, Prop. 7.

[15] Pt. IV, Props. 3, 5, 6.

future rather than the present, reason on the other hand is timeless, and in so far as the mind conceives a thing according to the dictates of reason it will be equally affected whether the idea be of a thing present, past, or future. Again, reason is always engaged in finding new causal ties that bind an idea to other ideas, and in organizing and systematizing these connections; and in this way the idea is brought more frequently into the mind, and gets there a firmer standing. We may still find it impossible always to counteract the force of present impressions. But by dwelling on rational considerations in our calmer moments, and by forming rules of conduct, based on these, which grow familiar with repetition, and so come to affect the imagination also, we gradually acquire instruments that we may resort to in times of need.[16]

All this increases a man's control over himself and his surroundings. Knowledge, as we say, is power; the wider one's contact with reality, and the more varied his interests and capacities, the more truly self-sufficient he is. And in particular the potency of knowledge shows itself in connection with the emotional life. When the emotions cease to be a blind impulse toward some partial and half-understood goal, and instead we stand aside and view them objectively as facts in the economy of nature, their character cannot fail to be transformed. We see how trivial are the things that once seemed vital to us, how absurd the heat and passion of our pursuit; while for the urge of passion, thus displaced, a new motive power is substituted in the form of a calm and rational self-understanding. For to all actions toward which we are moved by an emotion which is a passion, we can be equally determined without that emotion by reason alone, and better determined. An intelligent apprehension of human good is, for example, a safer guide than pity. He who is easily touched by the emotion

[16] *Cf.* Pt. II, Prop. 13, Schol; Pt. IV, Props. 9, 11; Pt. V, Props. 6, 9, 10.

of pity constantly is doing things he afterwards regrets. He is liable to be deceived by false tears; and in the absence of rational understanding he can never in any case be certain what is for the sufferer's real good.[17]

The practical advantages accruing to Spinoza's doctrine of deliverance through disinterested reason, based on the recognized necessity of things, is best summarized in his own words:

> It remains for me now to show what service to our own lives a knowledge of this doctrine is. This we shall easily understand from the remarks which follow. 1. It is of service in so far as it teaches us that we do everything by the will of God alone, and that we are partakers of the divine nature in proportion as our actions become more and more perfect and we more and more understand God. This doctrine, therefore, besides giving repose in every way to the soul, has this advantage also, that it teaches us in what our perfect happiness or blessedness consists, namely, in the knowledge of God alone, by which we are drawn to do those things only which love and piety persuade. Hence we clearly see how greatly those stray from the true estimation of virtue who expect to be distinguished by God with the highest rewards for virtue and the noblest actions, as if for the completest servitude; just as if virtue itself and the service of God were not happiness itself and the highest liberty. 2. It is of service to us in so far as it teaches us how we ought to behave with regard to the things of fortune or those which are not in our power, that is to say, which do not follow from our own nature; for it teaches us with equal mind to wait for and bear each form of fortune, because we know that all things follow from the eternal decrees of God, according to the same necessity by which it follows from the essence of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles. 3. This doctrine con-

[17] Pt. IV, Prop. 50, Schol.

> tributes to the welfare of our social existence, since it teaches us to hate no one, to despise no one, to mock no one, to be angry with no one, to envy no one. It teaches everyone, moreover, to be content with his own, and to be helpful to his neighbor, not from any womanish pity or superstition, but by the guidance of reason alone, according to the demand of time and circumstance. 4. This doctrine contributes not a little to the advantage of common society, in so far as it teaches by what means citizens are to be governed and led, not in order that they may be slaves, but that they may freely do those things which are best.[18]

7. It is undeniable that in large part, at least, what Spinoza here has to say about the pragmatic value of his naturalism and determinism is verifiable in experience. And yet the underlying difficulty still remains; in a way it is heightened by the very attempt to emphasize the practical virtues of his doctrine. When Spinoza tells us that everything has been created by God so perfect that it cannot be more perfect,[19] that it already contains just the amount of reality it needs in order to fill its destined place in the whole, that as following from God's nature it *could* not be other than it is, it is natural to inquire whether this does not mean repudiating ethics altogether. If perfection and reality are identical, how can any object, being already perfect, look for more perfection? Or if saint and sinner are alike in God's sight and both equally necessary expressions of his essence, why, even were the thing conceivable, should the sinner desire to be anything but what he is, or the saint wish to see him altered? But this is hardly a conclusion that Spinoza himself draws. The whole intent of his philosophy is to show us how man can escape the imperfections of his natural self and reach out to an ideal—can secure salvation. And in spite of what he has to say about the unreality and relativity of value terms, we presently find

[18] Pt. II, Prop. 49, Schol. [19] *Short Treatise,* Ch. vi.

him applying these terms as if they stood for something immensely vital and important. What is the reconciliation?

Within certain limits an answer is available. Conceptually, to begin with, we are to notice that "perfection," rather than "good," is Spinoza's way of characterizing the ideal; "good" represents the means through which we approach the perfect model. It is true that perfection also appears in Spinoza as itself man's highest good, and this rather complicates the matter. But postponing for the moment the obscurer problem, the substitution of the term perfection at least helps make more intelligible his doctrine. If perfection means reality, there is a sense in which it seems natural to say that the more reality a thing contains the more it approximates perfection, even though in another sense anything whatsoever has the perfection that belongs to it as a constituent and necessary element of the whole. Now it is possible for man, as he comes to know himself, to form the abstract notion of a standardized human type which, being completely real because it follows from the truth of God's own essence, constitutes an ideal of perfection in the former sense.

Such an ideal is not present to universal nature. For the plenitude of God's perfection it is necessary that all grades of reality equally should exist; and, besides, God does not think in the abstract terms which such a standard implies. Morality, as involving this abstract ideal, must always be a human and relatively inadequate way of viewing truth.[20] At the same time, while not the ultimate truth itself, morality is genuinely valid for man from his particular standpoint as a finite being. An ideal due to reason must share in the objectivity of reason in a sense not true of the vulgar standards of good and evil which Spinoza has in mind when he rejects teleology. While both alike fall short of absolute reality, there is a vast difference between final causes in their ordinary meaning, and the goal of per-

[20] Pt. IV, Preface; *Letter* 19.

fection. The one assumes that the universe is concerned to promote man's ends in the shape of his desires, or of the particular forms of human good that rest upon inadequate ideas. But it is the very nature of such ends to be unsatisfying, to conflict with one another, to come to no fruition; we may discount them as forms of good because they do not represent man's *real* good as a unitary being, but only the satisfaction of this or that partial aspect of his nature. Perfection, on the other hand, or the full realization of man's essence in the shape of clear and adequate thinking, is free from the practical defects that accompany the usual notion of teleology; and we may accept it as a genuine goal without the reservations which the word teleology suggests.

Nor does the doctrine of necessity present any fatal obstacle to the possibility of attaining an ideal so understood. In calling human actions necessary, Spinoza does not intend to make them a mere by-product of physical events. It is the peculiarity of his theory that mind is *never* influenced by the body; ideas or mental modes find their cause in other ideas, and not in modes of extension. The whole method of man's development, therefore, must be interpreted in terms of spirit; it is a process of enlightenment or understanding, not of a mechanical compulsion from external causes. To be sure, such a process is at every point inevitable and subject to destiny. But this does not mean that mind is unimportant and otiose; on the contrary, the determinate laws of our nature are precisely such as make ideas the chosen instrument of a growth in perfection.[21] And in proportion as these ideas are true and adequate do they render action that is conscious of itself and of its cause, action informed with insight, superior in kind to other forms of action.[22] It is more perfect as having more of God in it, though this does not mean that the other is *im*perfect; and by virtue of it man ceases to be a mere tool, and becomes an intelligent agent.[23]

[21] Pt. IV, Prop. 23. [22] *Letter* 23. [23] *Letter* 19.

To estimate the emotional satisfactoriness of such a doctrine it will be necessary to isolate again its central motive as this already has been briefly characterized. Spinoza is the chief of those who find things good in so far as they are *real*. Without doubt a genuine human value is present here. A readiness to look reality in the face, to take facts for nothing more nor less than what they are, is a highly important ingredient in the spiritual life, without which sentimentalism would reign unchecked. But just what constitutes its value? In point of fact there are several different forms its significance might take. There is its scientific value in the narrow sense; it gratifies an intellectual curiosity to know that things exist in this way rather than in that. Connected with this, but having a much wider reach, is the pragmatic value that attaches to a sober sense of reality. To recognize dispassionately where the possibilities of human action end and utopianism begins, to accept the limitations which this puts on action while clarifying the emotional life to correspond, to view one's fellows in the same dry light of reason and to make allowances for their necessary shortcomings—this, as Spinoza shows impressively, is an achievement apart from which life inevitably is muddled, impracticable, and needlessly perturbed.

8. But there is still another significance to "realism"; and it is here that the difficulties begin to show themselves. So far the valuable consequences have no obvious connection with spiritual enthusiasm or emotional exaltation. We accept reality. But there is no need we should approve it; good still means human good—the only meaning which the word concretely carries—and we have no temptation to confuse it with the "real." Reality is accepted not because whatever is is right, but because the chances on the whole are greater of achieving human ends if we submit to necessary conditions and do not aim at the impossible; and to whatever stands in the way of human good we still may decline to extend our approval, even though also we refuse

to let ourselves be worked up over it in a way to interfere with clear-headed efficiency of action, or with the measure of happiness or contentment that is humanly attainable.

And if now realism attempts to go beyond this, and to talk as if it had in its own right some ideal claim, it is at the apparent risk of once more introducing into the objective laws of nature that same reference to human valuation which naturalism starts out by rejecting. It is one thing to say that natural laws ought to be accepted because only so can man secure the most the world offers him. It is another to say that in itself existence or actuality constitutes a human standard of perfection, and therefore puts man under some spiritual obligation to submit to it irrespective of the practical human consequences he is enabled by such a submission to effect. The bare fact that the world is a particular kind of world has as such not the slightest tendency to lead us to adopt its nature as the goal of our own efforts. If reality had, as it well might be conceived to have, the qualities that man calls devilish, there is no reason why it should not, so long as man is what he is, call forth in him, not submission, but antagonism and hate; and for the scientist or philosopher to try to stem this by insisting that reality is "real" is an irrelevance. It is immoral also; it is the same sort of immorality that the scientist condemns in the religionist when the latter claims that a law of God can render good that which to man seems evil and unjust. An appeal to Nature has a logical hold on the human conscience *only* when we have tacitly assumed that existence and worth are convertible terms. But once our attention is called to this assumption we see that they are *not* the same. Something must be added to being before value can emerge. And if we start by denying outright that value has other than a human reference, there is no logical possibility of making the transition. All that then can happen is, either that our ideals should be emptied explicitly of everything of a universal character, or else

that we should allow our inexpugnable sense of value to return, covering the logical chasm by the essentially meaningless claim that we are not now using our words in their human sense—that is, in the only sense they have.

It is not to be denied that very much of Spinoza's teaching can be interpreted in a way to escape the dilemma here. So long as we confine the terms good and bad strictly to his own formal definition of them, identifying a knowledge of the good simply with the consciousness of pleasure that marks an increase of power or perfection, and of the bad with a similar consciousness of what is contrary to our nature, then, *if* it is in the activity of clear and adequate thinking that the laws of human nature get expression, the knowledge of reality will *for us* be valid as an ultimate form of goodness, whether or not the term is applicable to nature in the large. If Spinoza intends to say this and nothing more, what has been pointed out as most characteristic in his purely ethical conclusions will in point of fact remain essentially unchanged. The ideal standard still will take the form of the free man who finds his true blessedness in liberty of mind, who aims at nothing but the exercise of intelligence in the perception of things as they are, who desires only what is necessary, and in whom the sense of intellectual freedom, of superiority to all that is partial and contingent, of achieved rationality, is its own sufficient reward.[24]

But it is not at all certain that Spinoza *does* stop here. We might consistently call the "endeavor of the best part of us to agree with the whole of nature" an ideal good, without any intention of extending value terms to the Whole itself; good is "natural" only in so far as it is the goal of *human* nature. But this is to imply a subjective limitation which it is difficult to think is Spinoza's final meaning. In saying that man cannot hate what is real he might, indeed, mean simply that, since good is what satisfies desire, and

[24] *Cf.* Pt. IV, App.

since the intellectual essence of desire is to know reality, whatever we recognize as real is bound to give pleasure to us, and so be felt as good. But while this may satisfy the logic of his words, it does not explain their emotional background. It is not my psychological activity alone, but something in ultimate reality itself, some quality in the object, that it is most natural to take as giving its flavor of exaltation to the disinterested love of truth. Otherwise we are left only with a pretentious and rather arrogant intellectual self-sufficiency, which little in man's actual status and achievements goes to justify.

And the more indefinite impression from his words to which such a judgment can appeal rises in certainty in the light of one final aspect of Spinoza's thought. At the conclusion of the *Ethics* Spinoza goes on briefly to suggest a still higher state of attainment than is to be found in the happiness that attends the life of intellectual endeavor. Man is not merely a finite creature striving more or less successfully after increase of power and of being. While every object alike may be viewed under the form of eternity, to man it is open also to bring to self-consciousness this connection with the Whole, and by so doing to achieve immortality—an immortality that consists not in endless persistence, but in a timeless identification with the vision of eternal truth which is God himself. And in this consummation, where the body becomes aware of its essence as flowing not from other things, but from the very reality of God's own nature, and where we rise above the happiness of progress to the blessedness of full self-realization, we do not merely love God as the true and adequate cause from which flows our human good. We enter into the very love by which God loves himself.

Here we are to all appearance in a region which supplements, if it does not compel us to correct, Spinoza's purely ethical results. For these last it may sometimes seem enough that the love which constitutes anything a good

should be a love that is a mere concomitant of finite effort due to the frailty of our human nature, which would not be able to exist without having something to enjoy with which it may be united and strengthened.[25] On such a showing the good with its emotional heightening might actually, as Spinoza's definitions suggest, be valid only from a particular and limited point of view, and have no significance from the standpoint of the whole; so that if man were born free, and had no need to aim at an increase of being in the shape of pleasure, he would form no conception at all of good and evil.[26] But if God does not simply know himself, but loves himself as well, and if it is this eternal love that constitutes man's final goal, the restriction no longer seems to hold. Perfection will not now appear as an abstract standard instrumental to man's private growth, but as an absolute emotional character added to, and qualifying, the passionless ideal of logical completeness. And this will mean that human good, rightly interpreted, is still being used as an intrinsic quality to define reality, and so that anthropomorphism had not been wholly exorcised after all.

9. If this really follows, however, it becomes all the more important to return to the human concept, and make certain we have read man's nature rightly. Spinoza's main ethical conclusions hold, it has appeared, *if* man's happiness is found in possessing clear ideas, in knowing truth. But this is a point on which suspicion may be cast, quite apart from the relation he thinks of as existing between human nature and universal nature. And without entering into any extended argument, it is enough to indicate two lines which a criticism of Spinoza's ideal might take.

On the side of theory the modern thinker will be pretty sure to hesitate before subscribing to the intellectualistic

[25] *Short Treatise,* Ch. v.
[26] *Ethics,* Pt. IV, Prop. 68.

psychology on which Spinoza's reasoning is founded. The identification of will with intellectual affirmation or denial, and of emotion with confused ideas, does not readily fall in with the results of biological and psychological science at the present day. But more important are considerations in terms of the ethical experience itself. Whatever element of value there may be in an ideal which finds man's true advantage only in what tends to promote enjoyment of the life of mind, and however fully this might, in noble natures, succeed in accomplishing the same social objects that in most men are dependent on the urge of natural feelings, it is still open to dispute whether the outcome satisfies entirely our sense of value or proportion. Compassion, for example, needs guidance from the reason if it is to avoid the risk of doing harm as well as good; but from this alone it does not follow that the place of pity for human ills is adequately supplied by a dispassionate rational recognition that the good of others is bound up in the economy of nature with our own.

And generalized, such a doubt touches even that central feature of Spinoza's ethics which is perhaps the chief source of its attractiveness to most readers. "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life" [27]—this is one of Spinoza's most impressive sayings. Nevertheless the admonition always to dwell upon the good and pleasant, and to refuse to turn our thoughts to evil, pain, and sorrow, may—as the modern career of such a doctrine plainly indicates—very well mean imperiling the realism at which Spinoza aims. At least it is evident that the view of evil as negation springs from logic rather than experience. And if experience should happen here to be the safer guide, something inevitably is lost to a philosophy that forbids the natural reaction to things we instinctively condemn. Because these

[27] Pt. IV, Prop. 67.

have natural causes which it is desirable we should understand, it does not follow that pure science should govern our judgments to the exclusion of those deep-lying human preferences which also are the work of nature. We may view with an amused and condescending eye the naughtiness of children just because the child is not as yet a moral creature, and therefore we are able to dissociate the purely natural from the moral judgment. But how far it is wise to extend the same complacency is another question. When men have reached the stage of reason, a touch of moral indignation now and then would seem not out of place, even in the interest of the wrongdoer himself.

And toward our own delinquencies, at any rate, we can hardly afford to be too dispassionate and scientific. The man who has no inner detestation for the foolishness of folly or the despicable nature of his sin is lacking in something with which it is not clear that the moral experience can dispense. Spinoza's doctrine apparently reduces moral duty in its useful aspect entirely to the social compulsion through which nature has determined that man's moral education should be effected; he leaves nothing in the form of an inner emotional restraint to mediate between the commands imposed by the state through its superior power, and the dictates of a fully enlightened self-interest which finds no temptation whatever in unsocial action.

10. It may be well to try to summarize briefly the rather elusive character of Spinoza's ideal in its relation to more familiar forms of naturalism. That the objective laws of nature are more fundamental than the rules of human morality is in some sense plain enough. Such laws represent the way nature actually performs; they are inviolable, whereas moral rules unluckily are often easier to break than they are to follow. Even when we go on to recognize that human nature also has its laws which issue in morality, we still can distinguish the fundamental bases of conduct, the way men *must* act if they act at all, from the special

types of conduct which we call respectively right and wrong, and which are both alike grounded in more ultimate laws of biology or physics.

And certain ethical values attaching to this naturalism are also plain. Natural laws are not something to be protested or ignored as a limit to man's freedom; if liberty lies in action, its whole possibility depends on accepting the determinate conditions which alone make action possible. We must start by taking man as he is rather than as what we should like to have him be. And this means that, in practice, all effective incentives must grow out of the facts of man's pre-moral constitution. True moral education takes the form, not of substituting ideal for natural ends, but of a natural growth along lines which the established structure of reality determines. We cannot change ourselves, or other men, by pious exhortation, but only by getting at the causes actually at work in human conduct. In an important sense character is a given fact which cannot arbitrarily be altered; we can only help it unfold its inherent possibilities. And in the last analysis, too, each man must be the judge of what his own nature calls for. We may to an extent induce external habits by manipulating circumstances. But morality is the product of conscious preference and choice; and the only sort of motive that anyone can consciously accept is in terms of what his own judgment tells him promises advantage and satisfaction to his individual nature.

But while all this is so, it still leaves the most significant aspect of the case untouched. There may be a sense in which religion and morality consist in a willing and cheerful coöperation with the laws of man's nature and of society. But we have at the same time to remember that such laws, in so far as they are moral, do differ empirically from "necessary" laws in that they may be disregarded, as the facts of human sin and suffering show. In other words, they work through the medium of "ideas"; and this new machinery

changes the whole situation. It requires us now to make a distinction, and a conscious choice, between the laws of our lower nature which result in bondage, and the laws which represent our "real" good. And the only way to test whether a law of conduct is working in this latter interest is, not by the fact that it is unavoidable—which it is not—but by its relation to a judgment of approval arising from the measure of satisfaction it affords us as conscious or spiritual beings. And if the source of this approval is neither necessity nor actuality, but a new value quality which, quite conceivably, a given "natural" law might be impotent to provoke, there is nothing logically to prevent such a law from calling forth, instead, a feeling of disapproval, in a way to undermine that cheerful coöperation in which Spinoza's theory issues.

It might do this, that is to say, *unless* we suppose, with Spinoza, that what realizes man's essence is not the utilizing of natural forces under the mind's guidance as an instrument, but simply and exclusively the desire to *know*, so that *whenever* we come by knowledge into contact with reality, the laws of our being are thereby satisfied, and the feeling of approval follows. On this outcome, therefore, the verification of Spinoza's ideal finally depends. If to know things as they are in God is man's sole destiny and sufficient good, an attitude of piety toward all natural law is justified. But otherwise we may still continue to refuse our tribute to a fact simply because it is a fact, and may stand on our right to follow out our sense of value whatever the compulsion from things as they exist. For the laws of science, and the laws of ethics, have this important difference, that for genuinely creative action the real still remains indeterminate; it is approval, not fact, that guides our choice, since the "fact" is yet unborn.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ETHICS OF REASON

CUDWORTH · MORE · CLARKE · WOLLASTON · CUMBERLAND

1. As there has already been occasion to observe, the early course of the development of ethics in England, where the science was now preparing to take up a settled abode, was everywhere overshadowed by the horrendous figure of Hobbes, whose immoral and impious doctrines called forth a stream of refutations. These criticisms of Hobbes, in so far as they are fundamental, may be summed up under three main headings: He was held, most generally, to be depriving morality of its objective sanctions and its foundation in ultimate reality, whether we call this natural or divine. He was stripping away the social qualities which alone make man respectable, and leaving him naked as a mere animal organism. And—a specially important corollary of this—he was denying any authority to the feelings, and was making an intellectual perception of the consequences for self-interest the only sort of motive deserving to be called reasonable. The last criticism, which alone was justified fully by the facts, does not come to the front until a little later. That the other two were somewhat wide of the mark did not, however, affect the zeal with which they were urged.

Taken in the large, the thing which gives to English theory its most obvious character as contrasted with earlier speculations is its far greater preoccupation with the problem of ethical sanctions, and the tendency, in consequence, growing in explicitness, to subordinate the concept of the good to the concept of duty or of conscience. Greek ethics—and this is true of Spinoza also, whose natural affiliation is

with the classical tradition—had taken the latter concept lightly, and had assumed that when man sees the end to which his nature points he will as a matter of course desire to follow it. The changed emphasis was brought about in part through the displacement of naturalism by theology. Christian doctrine had lent to the notion of "authority" an importance which before it had not possessed; and this tendency to locate the source of obligation in something external to human nature had rendered it necessary to investigate more closely the claim which authority has upon us. And with the problem once started, even those thinkers who were not content to find the ground of moral duty in the divine command were forced to go to more pains to provide a rational substitute. Connected with this, also, is a change which had come about in the way "rationalism" was interpreted. When the tendency is to think of reason as an organic unity of man and nature, the authority of reason may seem to need no special consideration. But there was now a growing disposition to regard the rational life, not as an intrinsic property of living experience, but as the exercise of the intellect in perceiving more or less particular and isolated "truths"; and so regarded it was inevitable that a separate question should need asking as to why such truths should claim to influence conduct.

In starting with a group of theories which in this new sense may most conveniently be denominated "rational," attention should be called to the somewhat arbitrary character of the classification. From now on the motives which enter into ethical speculation become more and more entangled, so that it is impossible to place them under rubrics that are not in part misleading; "utility," for example, which in another chapter will be used to characterize a special group, makes its appearance almost everywhere. The "ethics of reason" is particularly ambiguous. Not only do all ethicists alike claim for their own theories that they alone are truly rational, but reason by no means carries

identical implications even among the philosophers who are dealt with in the present section. Nevertheless they all have this at least in common, that they are primarily concerned to defend, as the source of moral authority, some form of an objective intellectual perception of qualities or relationships inherent in the constitution of the world, in opposition to what they take to be the Hobbian contention that reality as such is non-moral, and that good and bad, right and wrong, are only relative to human interests and desires.

Such a thesis Ralph Cudworth, the Cambridge Platonist, undertakes to establish in his *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality,* but in a form so general and abstract as to have little interest at the present day, except as it may be thought to anticipate certain very recent tendencies toward a Platonic realism in ethics. Cudworth argues that all intelligible explanation is derived, not from the particular and transitory facts of sensation and feeling, but from a rational content which the mind apprehends directly by an "innate cognoscitive power." These essences or natures which alone render the world—even the material world—understandable are original, indestructible, absolute, independent of the will; they are what they are, and mind has simply to recognize and accept them. They are real, indeed, only in the form of knowledge, though this cannot mean, of course, our finite knowledge; the knowledge with which they are identified is an absolute truth existing ultimately for the mind of God. But even God cannot prevent the nature of a thing from being what it is. "Things" are brought into existence by the will of God. But their essence cannot be created even by divine power; it is a part of the eternal and immutable framework of the intelligible universe.

It needs no argument that goodness and justice are intelligible essences rather than created objects. And it follows that morality is objective and eternal. Things may as well be made white or black by mere will, without whiteness or

blackness, as morally good and evil by mere will without any "nature" of goodness.[1] Cudworth uses this as an infallible argument against all attempts to found morality on authority, whether of earthly rulers or of God himself; if it were not morally good and just in its own nature that God should be obeyed by his creatures, the bare will of God could not beget any obligation.[2]

2. Based on the same general philosophical standpoint, but going into much more concrete detail, is the *Encheiridion Ethicum* of Cudworth's friend and colleague, Henry More. Here the part which objective reason plays in ethical judgments is represented by a group of more specific principles, too loosely connected to mark any great advance in ethical theory, but typical of the form of treatment that English rationalism was very generally to adopt. We perceive intuitively, for example, that rationally we ought to pass the same judgment on ourselves that we do on others; that the good of two men is double that of one man, and therefore preferable in the same proportion; that greater and more certain pleasures ought to be preferred to lesser and more dubious ones; that it is good to obey magistrates, and better to obey God than man; that we should give to each man what belongs to him; and the like.[3] More distinctive of the influence of the Greek tradition is a semi-mystical conception of man's end as the "perfection of that conduct according to virtue which is the highest life."[4] True happiness is the pleasure the mind enjoys in the exercise of a supreme faculty of human nature, through which it perceives the form or essence of the good as it exists in its divine source. By this "boniform faculty" we know what is absolutely best, and rejoice in it alone. It is not to be regarded as mere intellectual apprehension, but as a "certain tranquillity and serenity of mind," which combines with knowledge an intimate life and sensibility by which it savors

[1] Bk. I, Ch. ii, Sec. 1.
[2] Bk. I, Ch. ii, Sec. 3.
[3] Bk. I, Ch. iv.
[4] Bk. I, Ch. ii, Sec. 3.

and is delighted at the absolute best; it supplies an inner norm by which reason itself is examined and approved, and suggests Spinoza's intellectual love of God, from which the love of our human neighbor also flows.[5]

3. The typical character of English rationalism is still more evident in Samuel Clarke, where its outlines are no longer obscured by the mysticism of the Platonists. But this simplification also brings to light its inherent superficialities. It is difficult to convince oneself that the serious attention Clarke has sometimes received is altogether deserved. Apart from a service rendered by the explicitness with which he formulates the general thesis that moral values are dependent on the perception of intellectual *relationships,* it is a question whether he has added much to the understanding of the ethical experience. Clarke is one of those vigorous-minded disputants who frequently succeed in getting more attention from their contemporaries than real thinkers do. His ethical doctrines are to be found in a series of sermons where they are incidental to the task of confounding atheists and freethinkers. His proof of the reasonableness of the Christian religion follows conventional lines, with much insistence on its demonstrative character, and on the stupidity and viciousness of those who will not grant this, but with few signs of originality or of a candid consideration of real difficulties. The ethical conclusions appear in connection with the demonstration of God's goodness, and are reducible to the thesis that goodness takes the form of indubitable and unchanging relationships which reason cannot help but recognize. Vice is thus the same in action that falsity or contradiction is in theory; the sole difference between mathematical and moral truth is that you can refuse to act upon the latter.[6]

For the most part Clarke leaves these relations undefined. But it is clear they stand in his mind for the accepted moral

[5] Bk. I, Ch. ii, pp. 5, 7; Bk. II, Ch. ix, pp. 15, 16, 18.
[6] *Boyle Lectures,* pp. 188, 202 (8th ed., London, 1732).

judgments of Protestant England, and that the appeal to their self-evidence is primarily an appeal to the prejudice his readers are bound to feel in their favor.[7] This is most obvious in the constant repetition of one phrase in particular—the "fitness" or "unfitness" of the application of different things or different relations. It is not fitting, for example, that an innocent being should be eternally miserable. It is fitter for God to govern by laws than to leave things in confusion, and to aim at universal good rather than at misery. It is fit that man should follow God's example, and deal according to the known rules of justice and equity. What especially lets the cat out of the bag is the application of the phrase to the needs of social order—the "fitness or suitableness of certain circumstances to certain persons, and an unsuitableness to others, founded in the nature of things and in the qualifications of persons"; here Clarke plainly has in mind the importance for a rational morality of a proper sense of contented subordination to God, or to ecclesiastical authorities, in religion, and to one's superiors in the political state.[8]

Some qualification of the foregoing judgment is perhaps called for in connection with one aspect of Clarke's reasoning—the relational judgment that a greater quantity of good has the right of way over a lesser quantity, and that the good of any single individual, therefore, is proportionally unimportant, even though it be that of the agent himself, in comparison with the good of all. This is a principle capable of being used for deducing rules of conduct, and, in particular, for grounding the social character of morality.[9] But such a principle is not original with Clarke; and his treatment adds nothing in the way of logical precision. The absence of a firm grasp on essentials is very apparent when he deals with obligation. He wishes to separate obligation from a dependence merely on the power of God, and to make morality binding in its own right. But the reason

[7] *Cf.* p. 179. [8] *Cf.* pp. 213, 240. [9] *Cf.* p. 206.

why it is thus binding either takes the form of a strong assertion and an appeal to his hearer's sense of fitness, or else it swings back again to God's authority, on which of course he is unwilling to cast any slight; so that in the end it is impossible to determine what his position really is. "The same relations which always and necessarily *do* determine the will of God *ought* to determine the will of all subordinate intelligent beings";[10] here apparently he is trying to make fitness itself a binding tie. But the only fundamental reason he suggests why we should accept these relations which the mind perceives as guides to conduct is that otherwise we are presumptuously and insolently setting up our own unreasonable will in opposition to the nature and reason of things, and offering the highest affront to the Creator.[11]

4. The same rationalistic thesis that appears in Clarke is maintained by Clarke's contemporary, William Wollaston. "Thirty years' profound meditation," Leslie Stephen remarks, "had convinced Wollaston that the reason why a man should abstain from breaking his wife's head was that it was a way of denying that she was his wife." The implied judgment is something less than generous. Wollaston's thesis that all vice can be reduced to the vice of lying, and all the virtues to truthfulness, will not, indeed, bear very close inspection as it stands. Further, in trying to prove his point there is a conspicuous lack of accurate definition; truth-speaking, truth, reason, fact, good, right, laws of nature, are used almost indiscriminately, so that the argument becomes at times no more than verbal. To say that, if a false proposition is wrong, an act which implies such a proposition cannot be right, or that only such pleasure as is *true* can be a good pleasure, is obviously to beg the ethical question.

Nevertheless the main thing that Wollaston is trying to get at is capable of being turned to good ethical account.

[10] P. 150. [11] Pp. 124, 249.

What he really means is, not that an act of cruelty or injustice is a falsehood, but that it corresponds in the realm of action to what a falsehood is in speech, or a logical contradiction in the realm of thought. Actions no less than words may assert or deny a truth. But the adulterer, for example, who acts implicitly as if a man's wife were not his wife, is not immoral because he is in strictness telling a lie; he is immoral because he is contradicting by his conduct certain true relations in the structure of society. Thus Wollaston's doctrine comes back to the familiar rationalistic claim that vice consists in action inconsistent with the true principles of reason as these are revealed in the constitution of the universe and of man. The "truth" to which he calls us to be loyal is the truth of fact; and lying is the inveterate disposition of mankind to act as if things were other than they really are while yet expecting to avoid the consequences of this obliquity.[12] Thus when he says that in the act of refusing charity I am denying the condition of the poor to be what it is, and my own to be what it is, what he really means is that charity is a necessary form of social relationship, which a lack of benevolence contradicts. Wollaston's applications of his principle are not particularly novel; but they show a natural generosity of temper, and on the whole they have the ring of good sense.

5. The rationalism of Richard Cumberland is of a materially different type from that of Clarke and Wollaston, and brings us much nearer to the more empirical method of determining rational law which was to dominate the later stages of English theory, and which culminated in Utilitarianism. Before turning to it, a few introductory remarks will be in order.

If one compares the work of British thinkers with the preceding great ethical systems, a difference of atmosphere is at once perceivable. Heretofore ethics has been wont to find its ultimate interest in a way of life whose source can

[12] *Cf. Religion of Nature Delineated,* p. 30.

usually be traced to native gifts of temperament. Plato, Epicurus, Spinoza—such thinkers stand for distinctive outlooks on man's life and destiny, which have taken their place among the recognized achievements of human culture. Such great spiritual creations are in England rare. It is noteworthy how tame and uniform is the practical art of living that emerges from intellectual programs often widely different. Whether it is Hume the detached skeptic, Hutcheson the apostle of moral sentiment, Butler the staid theologian, Bentham the radical reformer, the working code of personal ethics to which their reasoning leads seldom departs very far from that of the sober-minded English citizen, with his ingrained respect for order and moral precedent, and his suspicion of spiritual vagaries and unorthodox enthusiasms. Even Hobbes had started from highly unpopular premises only to justify essentially the same sort of life for man in his secular capacity that would have appealed to a country parson.

But this paucity of spiritual ideals has also a positive significance for the particular task which has fallen to the development of British ethics. The philosopher with a strong personal demand on life which he wishes to recommend will usually be more concerned to bring the facts of the ethical experience into line with this than to examine disinterestedly the terms which he employs. Such a task of analysis does not always lead, and seldom leads directly, to spiritual edification. Nevertheless it needs performing; and to British philosophy the credit for performing it is in a surprisingly large measure due. Being absolved from the need of recommending special values of its own, it could give its attention more unreservedly to a nice discrimination of the various psychological features involved —pleasure, emotion, obligation, and the like.

As a consequence of this new interest one tendency in particular appears, which runs through all of subsequent English ethics. As religious authority lost its predominance

as a guide to conduct, the need arose for some other standard to take its place. Such a standard the psychological tools most commonly employed would naturally have tended to find in the notion of individual happiness or pleasure; and the pressure toward a theoretical hedonism is in fact everywhere apparent. But this implicit hedonistic bias, instead of illuminating ethics for the English theorist, is constantly perplexing it, by pointing in a direction in which he obviously does not wish to go. The logical outcome of a consistent hedonism lies in the application of intelligence to the material of pleasant feeling so as to insure the largest possible product of happiness to the individual at the least possible expense. Very little of this preoccupation is to be found in English hedonism. The more self-consciously it insists on pleasure or utility as an end, the austerer become its notions of private happiness, and the more the individual man is subordinated to a larger good. A careful attention to the details of pleasure-seeking is, indeed, one of the last things likely to appeal to the typical Englishman. The conventional ideal of a personal rectitude and sobriety in subjection to the laws of the land, which sets the practical standard for English theorists no matter what their logical premises, finds its natural satisfaction in a different formula. This is the formula of the *public* happiness or welfare, to which nearly all the important English theorists in some degree subscribe.

The exact place of Richard Cumberland in this development may be open to dispute, though he anticipates clearly enough the general formula which the Utilitarians later adopted. In one way his use of the formula complicates the practical significance it came to have. The public which he has in mind includes God as well as man; and this lends a religious tinge to a doctrine whose normal tendency is toward secularism. Indeed, God's infinity makes it necessary to assign to him so widely disproportionate a share in the content of the total good as to leave to

human interests a secondary standing. The point is for Cumberland, however, more theoretical than practical. On the whole the social emphasis is uppermost; and a measure of historical significance for the utilitarian development may accordingly be granted him. At the same time deductions will need to be made from this in connection with the actual reasoning he employs in reaching his conclusions; and it is by the method of getting his results that a philosopher's importance is chiefly determined.

The deficiencies of Cumberland's theory can best be approached from the side of his polemical interest. His book is an attack on Hobbes, and has its motivation rather too directly in his resentment toward a lack of edification in Hobbes' doctrine such as a clergyman might be expected to feel. The attack is not unsuccessful in detail. It calls attention forcibly to some of the gaps in Hobbes' conception of human nature; and in spite of a disposition to beg the question on large issues, it points out a number of logical inconsistencies in the Hobbian theory. In so far it is a creditable piece of controversial writing. But Cumberland has the more ambitious aim of setting forth a comprehensive alternative theory of his own; and in this his success is less apparent.

In general Cumberland, while still employing essentially the same methods and principles that his predecessor had himself employed, proposes to recast the conception of a law of nature so that it may carry, outside the sphere of civil society, that same force of obligation which for Hobbes belongs exclusively to civil law. He agrees with Hobbes, that is—though the agreement is kept somewhat under cover by a nobler terminology—that man starts out by being interested in his private good, and that his conversion to true morality comes primarily from using experience and reason in the service of self-interest.[13] But also he insists that reason proves so conclusively man's inability to attain his

[13] *Cf. De Legibus Naturæ,* Ch. v, Sec. 45.

good except as he takes as his chief end the common good of all rational beings, that the laws of nature which set forth these necessary conditions of man's happiness are as literally laws, and have as much coercive force, as the laws of the state. Reason is not, as Hobbes had seemed to say, something to be set in opposition to nature, but itself is natural; the dictates of prudence are the very laws of Nature herself.[14] "A law of nature is a proposition proposed to the observation of, or impressed upon, the mind, with sufficient clearness, by the nature of things, from the will of the First Cause, which points out that possible action of a rational agent which will chiefly promote the common good, and by which only the entire happiness of particular persons can be obtained."[15] And *human* nature, therefore, ought not to be judged in terms of its crude beginnings before reason has been brought to bear, but in terms of its rational maturity.

In working out the proof of his thesis that such actions as are contrary to a care for the public good "bring evil upon each part of the system of rationals, but the greatest upon the evildoers themselves," Cumberland gathers together, diffusely but not unimpressively, most of the considerations, for the most part rather obvious ones, which have been used to support the claim that moral philosophy is founded on a necessary connection between the greatest happiness human powers can reach, and those acts of universal benevolence, or of love toward God and men, which branch out into all the moral virtues.[16] The foundation of the argument is the thesis that a rational being is bound to see that he is everywhere dependent on the coöperation of other rational beings for the attainment of any worth-while good, and that the only way to count securely on their service is through an attitude of benevolence that will make others disposed to adopt a similar attitude toward himself. This attitude presupposes, as its logical basis, the principle that if each man

[14] V, 7. [15] V, 1. [16] I, 15.

defines the good in terms solely of himself, rival goods are bound to clash; whereas in admitting that my neighbor's good is just as truly "good" as is my own, and so that the "greatest" good is the aggregate of the particular goods of all alike, an end has been set up in terms of which all rational beings can coöperate, each individual member of the whole assuring thus by common action his own chance of satisfaction.[17]

As the reverse of this, reason likewise tells each man that it is his duty to punish violations of the rule of social justice whenever they occur; and thus penalties at the hands of other men and of the state are to be counted among the "natural" sanctions that make benevolence a natural law. Still further, if a God exists, which Bishop Cumberland does not doubt, he before all others must be true to the laws of reason; and consequently divine retribution, here or hereafter, can be securely counted on to remedy whatever of failure there may be in human punishments. To these negative sanctions that attend the life governed by benevolence, and to the external advantages that come to us from the assistance of our fellows, are to be added the inner rewards of a good conscience, the pleasure attending the exercise of our highest faculties, and the joy and peace that accompanies a knowledge of our harmonious relationship with man and God. These last are the final fruits of good; and since they are intrinsic to the benevolent life itself, they are not subject to the uncertainties that have to some extent to be conceded in the case of external rewards and punishments, at least in their secular form.

6. In emphasizing so strongly the inner rewards of benevolence, Cumberland evidently has it in mind to minimize the egoistic implications which his reasoning carries; and the same motive appears in other forms. Thus he holds that the common good may appeal to me directly without my giving any thought to the self-interest involved. At the

[17] *Cf.* I, 21, 33; V, 23, 29, 48; *et al.*

same time his explanation of this possibility never really gets away from the supposition that we start by being aware of private good, and reason our way to the identity of private and public happiness until by habit the two come to coalesce. Cumberland also recognizes now and then the existence of special tendencies not reducible to self-interest which are natural in man. But of these he makes surprisingly little use; and the reason is, presumably, that since it is not the natural benevolence of man's nature he is interested in proving, but the existence of a rational law of nature such as makes of benevolence an obligatory standard, he is led to emphasize the sanctions that give the law its force rather than the natural goodness that in so far dispenses with the need of law and duty. It may be noted that Cumberland does not urge that man's kindness should be extended to the brutes as well; and this also is sufficiently explained by the fact that, in the case of the lower animals, the utilitarian argument no longer holds, since no answering reason in them offers a guarantee that they will repay our kindness.

A similar but equally half-hearted attempt to moderate the egoistic leanings of his theory is found in Cumberland's more explicit treatment of the nature and basis of obligation. He insists that the ground of obligation is objective, and does not lie in the mere hopes and fears that a thought of consequences sets up in our minds. But he also grants that only through such motives does the law get psychologically its hold upon us; [18] and he fails to make clear what he means by the term obligation after the sanctions that give it its purchase on the conscious mind have been removed. The obscurity is in no way lessened by the rôle which Cumberland assigns to God. The nature of things, so runs one of his more explicit utterances, represents to the mind what is best to be done. The mind concludes that God wills or commands it to be done, and in his name

[18] *Cf.* V, 11, 22.

imposes the command on itself. It then reflects, and pronounces that an action agreeable to this command will be just.[19] God's will, accordingly, is not the *source* of duty; though after the obligatoriness of an action is made known to us from its effects, it is much confirmed by considering the will of the First Cause.[20] What Cumberland apparently is trying to say is that obligation presupposes certain objective relationships in nature between various natural causes and their consequences. This is no doubt a fact, which even the defenders of a "subjective" theory would not deny. It is not with the perception of logical relations, however, but with the reason why such a perception ought to influence conduct, that a theory of obligation is primarily concerned; and for this no obvious ground is left except the bearing of the consequences on a man's own happiness.

All this points to the great defect of Cumberland's treatise. In it there is an acute and logical mind at work; but it is a logic employed to buttress a position taken over from accepted moral and religious dogmas, rather than dedicated to a really critical and disinterested examination of concepts. The truth is that Cumberland's book is a very excellent though long-winded sermon, with the typical merits and defects apt to be found in such a form of literature. The evident endeavor to be scientific, for example, will deceive only the incautious. Cumberland has an intelligent acquaintance with the science of his day. But he uses it as a clergyman rather than as a scientist; it is external to his real mental processes, and appears chiefly in the form of illustrations and analogies which aim to create an atmosphere of rigorous thinking hardly justified by the facts. The actual appeal of his argument depends on something very different—on current emotional values, that is, attaching to such words as piety, goodness, virtue, benevolence, as these are wont to be employed by men whose pri-

[19] IV, 1. [20] V, 35.

mary business it is to recommend virtue and religion rather than to probe their meaning.

And this is especially in evidence in Cumberland's main emphasis—the place assigned to a universal benevolence in the moral life, and the conception of human nature as centering about it. Hobbes, of course, goes too far in his cynical appraisal of human motives. But if Hobbes is prepared to find nothing but selfish interest at work, Cumberland is equally determined to see in man only the amiable and genteel. Such a picture it is understandable might represent the semi-official view of a kindly and scholarly clergyman exercising the duty of Christian charity. But it cannot by any stretch of the imagination apply to the scrambling world of politics and business, to say nothing of the more primitive passions of violence and lust.

Meanwhile it may be conceded that the difficulty of maintaining the lofty standard of benevolence in determining man's duty is lessened when we scrutinize Cumberland's actual meaning underneath the formulas he adopts. These formulas seem to say that a man ought to keep his eyes fixed always on the happiness of all rational creatures—in comparison with which his own is less than the smallest grain of sand to the whole mass of matter [21]—using this as a conscious criterion for determining the relative importance of ends and actions. But such an impression does not hold on a closer inspection. It appears in the first place that, since the public good is an aggregate, one is adding to its content by any happiness he secures for himself, provided this does not conflict with other people's happiness; and since a man has more power to create good here than elsewhere, the principle of the public welfare allows an indefinite measure of self-consideration. More important still, when one comes down to cases it becomes evident that with Cumberland benevolence takes a form calling for a degree of disinterestedness and Christian love that is after all not

[21] V, 22.

so difficult for the average Christian to reconcile with common sense. Put abstractly, we ought to work for the greatest aggregate or sum of good effects most acceptable to God and men, which can be effected by the greatest industry of all our future actions. But in practice the much more workable demand is that we should put forth effort "great enough that some advantage accrue to the whole, or at least that it suffer no damage whilst we endeavor to satisfy a part." A rule of universal benevolence which is capable of being summed up in the two precepts, to abstain from hurting any innocent person, and to contribute one's share to the general happiness, is not beyond the reach of human nature, and helps perhaps to explain Cumberland's optimistic judgment that the principles of reason for the most part actually prevail among men. Especially is this the case when the duties of positive benevolence translate themselves into the worship of a deity, a care of commerce and peace among nations, the indulgence of kindly feelings in the narrower circle of family and friends, the preservation against innovation of property rights and social classes, and, for good measure, the exercise of our social faculties by giving good advice when needed.[22]

It perhaps is worth while, before leaving Cumberland, to revert to the aspect of his reasoning which is most distinctively rationalistic. This is the logical consideration, really underlying his whole argument, that since the pleasure of each rational being is to himself a good, the aggregate of all these pleasures must be admitted to be a still greater good, and therefore should be taken as the highest end by every rational mind.[23] This principle of a mathematical calculation of values is, if it can be substantiated, obviously of first importance for an ethical theory. But its foundations ought for this reason to be made as secure as possible. Cumberland as usual wavers between alternative

[22] Intro. 21; I, 24, 26; II, 21; IV, 4; V, 14, 57; VII, 9.
[23] II, 4; V, 16, 19, *et al.*

explanations. At times the proposition merely intends to say that empirically the good of all will prove to be the good of each as well; and then we come back to the utilitarian argument, with whatever qualifications this may need. Elsewhere Cumberland appears to use it as a logical premise which depends not on particular experiences, but on a direct deliverance of reason. Meanwhile there is a third alternative which makes an incidental appearance in his reasoning—that the proposition represents neither an empirical generalization nor an immediate principle of reason, but a group of particular motives, due either to an immediate pleasure we take in benevolence, or, in a more intellectual form, to the dislike one has, as an instinctively rational being, of appearing to be inconsistent with himself, as he would be were he to allow the logically irrelevant fact that a good happens to belong to this or that individual to influence his judgment about the preponderance of good.

CHAPTER IX

THE ETHICS OF SENTIMENT

Shaftesbury · Hutcheson

1. To the generalization that English ethics runs as a whole to logical analysis rather than to the expression of any very intimate personal ideal of living, there are a few exceptions; and among these Lord Shaftesbury is to be reckoned. Shaftesbury has also made a contribution of real importance to ethical analysis. It is this that has chiefly determined his position in the history of ideas; and his theory can be evaluated independently of the practical demands that underlie it. Nevertheless a consideration of the meaning which a tenet of philosophy has for its first discoverer may always be expected to throw some light on its theoretical significance. Shaftesbury's personal bias may easily be overlooked in his earlier essay, from which his ethical doctrine has commonly been drawn. But in the *Moralists* this doctrine takes on a more personal character. And in the *Philosophical Regimen,* in particular, to which we have only recently had access, and in which Shaftesbury shows himself in an intimate undress to which he could hardly have brought himself in writings intended for the public, philosophy appears explicitly as a moral discipline, of importance to a sensible man only in proportion as it benefits the soul in its striving for the good.

As often happens, the formal outlines of Shaftesbury's theory can most usefully be approached by considering the opponents he has chiefly in his mind. In general he represents a reaction against the narrow and at times sordid aspects of a morality carried back to self-interest as its

source. This was something that everyone had cried out against when it appeared nakedly and in a purely secular form in Hobbes; and accordingly it determines Shaftesbury's attitude toward Hobbes' philosophy. But on the whole he is not, comparatively speaking, unappreciative of Hobbes' genius, or even of the strength of certain points in his position. The thing he is more directly concerned with is the existence of the same ungenerous opinion in more orthodox quarters, not only among the philosophers, including his former tutor Locke, who find the ultimate source of obligation in sanctions imposed by a divine lawgiver, but more especially in the case of those teachers of religion who seek to uphold the divine majesty by making obedience and orthodoxy the test of virtue, and who are led in consequence to deprecate the natural human qualities of kindliness, fair-mindedness, and simple goodness, and to urge the fear of punishment and the hope of future rewards as the truly Christian motives. There is, Shaftesbury writes, no more of rectitude, piety, or sanctity in a creature thus reformed than there is meekness or gentleness in a tiger strongly chained, or innocence and sobriety in a monkey under the discipline of the whip.[1]

This religious situation is in considerable degree responsible for the controversial form of Shaftesbury's writings, and for the half-way position, not easy for his contemporaries to understand, which he himself adopted. To the atheistical tendencies of his day he was for his own part utterly opposed; his whole philosophy rests on the belief in a deity of a sort. But the common opinion that atheism, by removing the fear of hell that alone keeps men in order, undermines morality, and the intolerance shown in the persecution of atheists for the sake of strengthening the moral sanctions, he attacks vigorously. Moral goodness springs only from a love of goodness for its own sake, independent

[1] *Characteristics,* Vol I, p. 267. (References are to Robertson's edition, London, 1900.)

of personal hopes and fears; and a main purpose of his ethical theory is to set forth and recommend this thesis.

Put briefly, then, it is in terms of the instinctive feeling it calls forth, and not of a theoretical apprehension either of abstract principles or of practical consequences, that virtue or human goodness ought to be defined. Why does a man admire benevolence and detest arrogance and injustice? Simply because, unless he is corrupted by bad habits and opinions, he cannot help it. "A common honest man, whilst left to himself, and undisturbed by philosophy and subtle reasonings about his interest, gives no other answer to the thought of villainy than that he cannot possibly find in his heart to set about it, or conquer the natural aversion he has to it." Without waiting to observe what happens, without conscious reasoning, normal human nature is so constituted as to go out immediately in approval or disapproval when it reflects on certain traits of character; and these instinctive judgments no more need explicit proof than we require to have it proved to us that we see objects when we open our eyes and look about us. "No sooner are actions viewed, no sooner the human affections and passions discovered, than straight an inward eye distinguishes, and sees the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable, apart from the deformed, the foul, the odious, or the despicable." There is in such human traits an inherent attractiveness, appropriateness, harmony, proportion, order, to which something within our breasts responds directly; we know that they are good and admirable not by argument, but through the deliverance of an immediate inner feeling, or moral sense. This is, for morality, what good taste is in manners, or the artistic sense in art; a gentleman does not argue about the difference between decency and indecency, or a true artist need to resort to reasoning in order to tell beauty from ugliness.

As an actual fact we are not dealing here with mere analogies; in essence the three things are really one. To

philosophize, in a just signification, is but to carry good breeding a step higher. For the accomplishment of breeding is to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in art; and the sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society and beautiful in nature and the order of the world. There is a beauty and deformity as well in actions, minds, and tempers as in figures, sounds, or colors; indeed it is here that the highest beauty will be found. Where is there on earth a fairer matter of speculation, a goodlier view or contemplation, than that of a beautiful, proportioned, and becoming action? Beauty does not lie in matter as such, but in the forms and proportions which mind impresses on it; and what mind creates in material of its own essence, instead of in alien clay or stone, must therefore take first rank. If anyone sees fit to deny that certain forms of character are in themselves admirable and lovable, while others are by nature calculated to inspire hatred and disgust, this is not proof that such distinctions are not real, but only the revelation that he himself is lacking in the good taste or moral sense which belongs to a normal human nature. Actually such a man would be found continually belying his own professions. One cannot feel—as even the skeptic feels along with other men—a sense of pride, or shame, or gratitude, or resentment, without discovering that the distinctions of value which he would have to be unreal and arbitrary are founded in nature itself, and unescapable; why should anyone be proud if nothing is really honorable, or indignant at a violation of his rights if justice has no intrinsic meaning? [2]

The gist of Shaftesbury's theory is, accordingly, that the distinguishing character of virtue is an inner beauty attaching to certain human traits and revealed directly by feeling, or an inner sense, as material objects are revealed by the outer senses; and no man is really virtuous who does not recognize and act upon these values out of preference and

[2] I, 87, 260, 296; II, 131, 137, 139f., 144, 255, 257.

love, rather than for benefits expected. To see more clearly what this means, however, it is necessary to call separate attention to several different aspects of it, all of them needed for a full understanding of Shaftesbury's position.

2. In a letter to his friend Robert Molesworth, Shaftesbury speaks of himself as "one who has little notion of magnificence, and less of pleasure and luxury, has not that need of riches which others have, and one who prefers tranquillity and a little study and a few friends to all other advantages of life, and all the flatteries of ambition and fame";[3] and the remark may conveniently be taken as a starting-point. Primarily it calls attention to the pronounced element of quietism everywhere present in Shaftesbury's notion of the good life; the softer and more passive virtues are the ones that make a real appeal to him. But also it carries a suggestion of the more special form which his ideal assumes. The object of the moral sense, whose inherent beauty calls for our approval, is for Shaftesbury first of all the social good, or, more strictly, the human qualities which lead the wise man to make the social good his end, rather than personal pleasures and ambitions; and one ground for this is to be looked for in an empirical recognition of the positive content which a cultivation of the humaner feelings and interests, especially in the form of friendly intercourse, adds to the actual happiness of a man's life. More than nine-tenths of whatever is enjoyed in life, Shaftesbury tells us, comes from this source,[4] even the pleasures of the body standing in need of the social affections if they are to give any valuable enjoyment.

As Shaftesbury's thesis is examined, however, the less central does this simple motive turn out to be. Something more than an appreciation of the pleasures of friendship is needed to account for the really characteristic part of his contention—the connecting of virtue with that feeling of

[3] *Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen,* p. 393.
[4] *Characteristics,* I, 299.

involuntary approval called forth by an intrinsic *beauty* in its object. The joys of friendship, or any other simple joys that Shaftesbury recommends, are attractive and desirable, but in themselves they are hardly beautiful. For this latter word to be appropriate there is need of relationships, order, harmony, proportion. The beauty of the moral virtues rests, that is, not on the feelings singly, but on the part they play in a larger scheme; they are beautiful because they are "natural," a necessary part of the ideal order of the world. This reference to what is so "by nature" is the foundation of Shaftesbury's whole doctrine; and friendship, like everything else, is to be approved only because, and in so far as, it can be shown to be in harmony with the ultimate law of Nature, to follow which is the sole means of happiness, and beyond which there is no measure or rule of things. Accordingly we find Shaftesbury urging that friendship is not moral unless it relates, not to this or that particular person, but to society, in the form of a love for universal man. For particular friendships are capricious and casual, based on no strict principle; and a genuine principle can only be one that does not halt at some arbitrary instance, but rests on a recognition of the place in the universe of man as such, as a source of his claims upon our approbation.[5]

Just what, then, does Shaftesbury intend we shall understand by this "universal" sentiment of friendship, if it is not the same as human love in its familiar sense? One suggestion might be that it is meant to stand simply for a feeling of general good will, and a readiness to accept the recognized rights of individuals in society—for the universal benevolence of men like Cumberland. As a matter of fact, however, it does not stand for this in any very distinctive way. The real sense which it has for Shaftesbury is to be found in the further consideration to which reference already has been made. Strictly speaking, virtue is not

[5] I, 299-301, 325; *Philosophical Regimen,* 3.

the love of man; it is the love of order and beauty in society.[6] This is what gives its content to the ethical part of his doctrine, with its proposed reconciliation between self-interest and benevolence. In so far as they are "according to nature," even the private passions and affections are, Shaftesbury holds, necessary and good. But they fulfil their natural function only as they subordinate themselves, not only to the needs of the individual organism, but to a still wider good—the welfare and prosperity of the species. Nothing can in the end justify our admiration and approval apart from the general system wherein it fills a place. And of this system even society itself is but a fragment. The final source of the attraction which the good possesses is found not in any particular beauty, even the beauty of character, but in the Whole.[7]

The doctrine of a universal First Cause, revealing itself in a Leibnitzian universe which, since it is the product of reason, is necessarily good in all its parts—"the numbers entire, the music perfect"—plays a central rôle in the *Moralists,* where it is supported by a quantity of metaphysical argumentation on which there is no need here to dwell. The important point to notice is that Shaftesbury's ardent eulogies of the divine perfection of the universe are no excrescence on his ethical system, but its logical foundation. The beauty which gives validity to the moral life is due to the contribution which the ethical virtues make to the general order; it rests on the enthusiastic contemplation of this system as a perfect whole in which all things praise God and apparent evils are transformed into instruments of a higher good.

This does not mean, it will be observed, an enthusiastic contemplation of our fellow men; on the contrary, the obvious fact that man and his works are so seldom of a nature to call forth our spontaneous admiration and respect

[6] *Characteristics,* I, 279.
[7] I, 244*sq.*; II, 21, 293; *Philosophical Regimen,* 9.

constitutes for Shaftesbury a real stumbling-block. It is to the human aspect of creation, whose beauty and perfection would be easier to recognize if man—"that wretched mortal ill to himself and cause of ill to all"—were out of the way, that the skepticism of Palemon in the *Moralists* is directed; "all is delightful, amiable, rejoicing, except with relation to man only and his circumstances, which seem unequal." [8] The larger aspects of society, its laws and institutions, reveal, indeed, the beauty of rationality. Even individual man proves the goodness of creation if we look to what he *might* become were he to regulate his passions and appetites in the interest of a "natural" way of living. But this is what few men are willing to do. The facts of the actual world about us—Shaftesbury is thinking mainly of the fashionable world in which his own lot was cast—present a much less engaging picture. It is in spite of man, rather than because of him, that we are able to look upon God's handiwork and call it good; it *must* be good, because we know that notwithstanding all appearance only good exists. This is the method of reasoning that Shaftesbury adopts expressly. The one safe course is, not to start from the apparent facts and allow them to shape our conception of the whole—it is always possible that these may be *merely* apparent—but to argue that since the universe is one and rational, and since reason can have no aim other than the good, evils must be such in appearance simply.[9] And only he whose love for this or that particular beauty thus springs from a wider cosmic love is fully grounded in the principles of virtue, and may expect to find the spirit of universal benevolence standing secure against the temptations to skepticism which assail the man of intelligence when he looks abroad unfortified by the assurance that philosophy brings.

3. If we were to regard merely the external logic that constitutes the framework of such a point of view, there

[8] *Characteristics,* II, 10, 67. [9] II, 108-9.

would be some excuse for dismissing it as an insipid philosophy which a more modern age has outgrown. And at times the temptation is strong to pass this judgment. It would not be difficult to make a case against Shaftesbury as a sentimentalist and dilettante, who is able to grow rhapsodical about the abstract Good because he ignores most of the concrete facts, and who is in love with his own refined sensibility rather than with his fellow man. But that this does injustice to his real sincerity a sympathetic reading of the *Moralists* will make clear; and especially does it become impossible to acquiesce in when the *Philosophical Regimen* is considered.

It will already have been recognized that the "beauty" of virtue and the moral life, as having its source in the order and proportion that constitute the goodness of a rational whole, is essentially a Stoic conception. Similarly, on the practical side, "reason" and "nature" have in general their Stoic sense, sentimentalized a little more strongly; they find expression in the relatively incomplex and quiescent sides of human nature, rather than in the passionate and competitive impulses which for a more evolutionary age form the central constituents of the "natural" life, but which to an eighteenth-century theism only seemed to raise obstacles to the perfection of a beneficent universe. In the *Regimen* this Stoicism becomes fully explicit; and it strikes what is perhaps as genuine and original a note as anything since the days of Seneca. Here the dogma of the perfection of the universe appears unequivocally, not as a means of holding to a speculative theodicy, or as an amiable æstheticism, but as a way of spiritual salvation. If we can be assured that all is right in the world, we have a foundation, both rational and emotional, for the one sure program of human happiness—tranquillity and acquiescence. The end to which Shaftesbury is methodically schooling himself, as a matter of moral discipline, is a Stoical endeavor to found inner happiness securely on the basis of an entire inde-

pendence of everything external—an endeavor whose logical motivation lies in an acceptance of the will of nature as a beneficent will, and of whatever happens, therefore, as a good. The aim of the truly wise man will be to learn how to submit all of his affections to the rule and government of the Whole, how to accompany with his whole mind that supreme and perfect mind and reason of the universe; this is to live according to Nature, to follow Nature, to own and obey Deity. It is in vain to think of being virtuous, just, or pious but upon this foundation. The pages of the *Regimen* are full of warnings against staking one's happiness on riches, office, ambition, pleasure, friendship even; the only sure hope for man is in that firm control over his own affections which asks for nothing that Nature does not freely give, and which safeguards human life by retiring from the competitive business of the world into the recesses of the mind itself, where the one goal is a resolute contentment resting on the certainty that all is for the best, and a self-discipline motivated far less by the positive claims of the life according to nature than by a spiritual sensitivity to the evils of the world of action. What meets us at the start, accordingly, as the universal love of man, has thus turned into something not very far removed from a disillusioned sense of the vanity of all earthly things.[10]

And from this standpoint it becomes easier to understand what otherwise might seem a paradox in Shaftesbury's position—the fact that, in spite of the cheerful optimism of his theory, the dark side of the human scene bulks larger than its happier qualities in his common judgments on concrete human nature. This hardly goes with the type of philosophy that springs first of all from a natural benevolence. Nor has it any obvious connection, even, with a primary interest in a theodicy concerned to explain away apparent evils, but for that reason unlikely to go out of its way to blacken the picture and so to make its task more difficult.

[10] *Philosophical Regimen,* 6, 7, 32, 36, 97, 219, *et al.*

But it is entirely consistent with the emotional reaction of a proud and sensitive man, without any natural aptitude for the sort of career appropriate to high rank and an illustrious name in England, too self-respecting to "flatter the great, to bear insults, to stoop and fawn, and abjectly resign one's sense and manhood" for the sake of political success, but yet at the same time keenly conscious of what is due his merits and position, so that he is driven alike to an *apologia* for his failure to meet the expectations of his friends, and to a defensive regimen to keep in check what evidently he felt to be a besetting weakness in his own nature—the desire for eminence and reputation, for which he nevertheless was not prepared to pay the cost. The ideal of "tranquillity" may make use of a theodicy as an intellectual prop. But because its chief end is practical rather than speculative, it can afford to be relatively careless of the risk of increasing speculative difficulties. Indeed it is the strong sense of evils which makes a refuge from them necessary; and the method of escape—through resignation —is not so congenial to the natural man but that it needs at times the reënforcement that may come from dwelling on these evils in imagination.

Meanwhile through the same practice of resignation and self-effacement a pessimistic view of human nature can come to some working agreement with that natural benevolence, or absence of all hatred and abhorrence, which a theodicy inculcates. "It is then only that thou canst truly love men when thou expectest neither thy good nor thy ill from them"; let one withdraw himself from competitions and self-seeking, and he is then prepared to regard the spectacle of the world with more complacence, just as we look on at the play of children, even when they are froward and unruly, with a kindly amusement and unconcern, because their petty interests do not really touch us.[11]

4. Shaftesbury's philosophy undoubtedly has lost in

[11] *Ibid.*, 2, 3.

plausibility through the progress of a scientific understanding of the world. This makes it increasingly difficult for the modern mind to feel altogether in sympathy with what for him was the indubitable point in his theodicy—the perfection of the world of nature in its extra-human form. The logical framework which his analysis presupposes no longer, therefore, calls for any very serious attention. What remains as the outstanding feature of his doctrine, in terms of its present-day significance for theory, is his recognition of the part that a feeling judgment plays in the ethical situation. To this some further notice is due.

In urging that we not only perceive ethical qualities in conduct, but have toward these a specific emotional reaction as well, Shaftesbury is filling a hiatus in most preceding theories. In its original form a sense of value is directed primarily to the valuable object, rather than to the valuer's own state of consciousness; and accordingly when even the philosopher has set out to justify some particular value which he feels, he usually has taken it as so self-evident as to need no proof, and has neglected to ask himself by what path he comes to its acceptance. One point against the finality of this has been that all men do not estimate things by precisely the same scale; and so if Plato, for example, takes for granted that intellectual system is the one great value in existence, he cannot expect to find converts among those who do not admit such a premise. But even if all men did agree much more closely than as a matter of fact they seem to do, it would still be incumbent on a conscientious thinker to account for this as a phenomenon of the human consciousness. And any attempt at explanation will bring to light the fact that whatever a man concretely values evokes in him a certain feeling when he views it.

That this feeling has anything to do with making the object valuable in the first place may or may not be true; that is one of the problems which the new recognition sets. And in view of the disposition of rival theories to denounce

any dependence on feeling as "subjective," it is significant that Shaftesbury would apparently have answered "no." He consistently maintains that the mere fact that we feel in a certain way does not determine moral truths, any more than a picture is bound to be beautiful just because a man happens to like it; "if that which pleases us be our good because it pleases us, *anything* may be our interest or good." [12] That alone is desirable which genuinely satisfies the human constitution—that which is "according to nature," and which does not simply titillate the senses; the question is not what is good for our appetites, but what appetites are good.[13] More specifically, a thing is good when on the one hand it is so essential to man's nature that he cannot be without it and still enjoy a mind free from disturbance or regret—a doctrine which issues in the Stoical repudiation of external and contingent goods; and, as a corollary, when it is good for every man alike.[14] There is an ultimate question of analysis here which Shaftesbury never really asks himself; coming as he did to a recognition of the fact of feeling through his reaction against a religious utilitarianism and rationalism which dispenses with the love of virtue for its own sake, he was more interested in validating the fact than in working out its logic. But the thing he pointed out is undeniable. The assured part of Shaftesbury's position is that morality involves a reflective process which takes its stand outside the natural impulses and approves these or condemns them, the approval or disapproval having an emotional quality which distinguishes it alike from disinterested factual or logical perception, and from the direct gratification of appetite or self-interest.

It is less clear to what extent one can follow Shaftesbury in his account of the object of this approval judgment. That morality may have an æsthetic appeal is a matter of experience. Moreover this æsthetic motive, though often

[12] *Characteristics,* II, 29*sq.* [13] II, 68.
[14] II, 149, 279; *Philosophical Regimen,* 55-6.

kept under cover, had in reality played a decisive part in the rationalistic tradition from the time of Plato down. It was the intellectual beauty attaching to order, proportion, neatness, and simplicity that determined for Plato the location of the highest good; and if such a motive is actually at work it is much safer to give it, with Shaftesbury, an explicit recognition. Nevertheless we have only to state the implication clearly to raise doubts about its sufficiency. There is a competing alternative—that the psychological source of the claim which forms of character have to our approval is to be looked for in their relation, not to the order of the universe at large as part of an æsthetic object, but to the springs of satisfaction in ourselves, which come to light in the form of experimental verification rather than of æsthetic perception. That Shaftesbury disregards this alternative is in line with the general tendency of his analysis to stop too soon.

And the particular content, likewise, to which he supposes the moral judgment to be directed, stands in need of a more careful scrutiny than he gives it. What he maintains is that, while goodness may belong to all things, virtue or merit belongs to man alone; and virtue, or moral goodness, involves bringing the affections themselves to reflective consciousness as subjects of a new liking or dislike, arising from the nature of their disposal toward the welfare of the species.[15] Now affections and dispositions are no doubt occasions of moral approval and disapproval. Furthermore *any* object of moral approval will involve affections, since we do not consider a thing to have a moral quality unless it issues from a conscious preference. At the same time, when the natural man feels indignation at injustice it is not the mere unsociable disposition of the agent that engages him. In so far as the resentment is rational this will be involved, since we do not grow indignant at sticks and stones; but consequences are what first arouse us. More strictly, it is

[15] *Characteristics*, I, 251-2.

the *act* of which intended consequences are a part; and if character is also implicated in the act, at least it is not character taken by itself merely as an inner disposition. Here again the reason Shaftesbury picks upon a particular element in the situation lies less in an adequate effort of analysis than in a practical motive; it is a part of his Stoic creed that only a well-disposed will may be called good, because only such a will lies fully under our control. But whatever the element of truth this claim may have, taken as ultimate it carries risks that Stoicism does not escape. Genuine good does not stop with the inner life, but transfuses the outer fact as well; and to minimize this is to encourage the subjectivism and sentimentalism which can usually be detected underneath its brave words, and from which Shaftesbury is by no means free.

In his treatment of another aspect of the ethical experience—the feeling of obligation—Shaftesbury is less explicit. The general trend of his argument is against attributing ultimate importance to the sense of conflict out of which duty grows. Both his polemical interest, and his theodicy, lead him to emphasize instead the fundamental identity between social virtue and self-interest; the burden of his attack on "selfish" theories is, not indeed that social should take the place of individual good, but that the whole separation between the two is based on a misapprehension of human nature.[16] It is the business of moral philosophy to show, as against man's natural readiness to yield to the superior strength of selfish propensities, that vicious or unsound pleasures are in reality injurious to self-interest, while to have strong public affections is the chief means and power of self-enjoyment; and as this perception becomes internalized through a love for virtue on its own account, the opposition between public good and private disappears.

Along with this a significance is, however, still left open

[16] I, 292, 336-8.

to obligation or to "conscience," as the mind's reflection upon actions which are naturally odious and ill-deserving, including, in its wider and less proper sense, even those actions which, without being public evils, are stupid and silly, because prejudicial to our highest welfare. Shaftesbury's theory of obligation thus tends to appear, though not with any great explicitness, as the negative side of his theory of virtue; as virtue is the quality of character whose beauty excites our approval, their deformity or ugliness makes other qualities odious and vicious, and to that extent restrains us from indulging them. Meanwhile though obligation has its subjective representative in the feeling of disapproval, here also Shaftesbury has no intention of suggesting that duty is *merely* relative to our feelings; vice is really odious, and our feelings simply report to us the facts.[17]

5. The theory of a moral sense had received at Shaftesbury's hands a rather free and literary treatment, after the style of the Greek moralists. The same doctrine was now brought within a more academic atmosphere by Francis Hutcheson, a professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow. Hutcheson is the first important British ethicist of the professorial type, whose interest is not primarily political, or theological, or personal, but who sets out to make ethics a subject of professional discussion. This more academic standpoint naturally results in a loss of general appeal. But on the other hand it enables Hutcheson to bring out the points of theoretical importance in a much sharper way; and in consequence he still remains the classical representative of his particular type of theory.

There are two things in particular that Hutcheson wishes to establish. First he wants to show, in opposition alike to Mandeville and his followers, and to the intellectualists with their theological leanings, that man does not act out of self-interest alone. He is animated also by disinterested springs of conduct which have directly in view others than

[17] I, 305*sq*.

himself, and which become his private interests, and procure him pleasure, only by way of this social reference; the selfish theory fails entirely to account for such things as friendship, gratitude, generosity, our approbation of acts distant in time or place from which we reap no personal benefit whatever, our want of approval toward actual benefits that are casual or unintended. Here Hutcheson did not have a very difficult task. No one apart from the necessities of some theory to which he is committed, or from the pleasure he takes in exploiting the weaknesses of human nature, is very likely to doubt seriously that mothers may love their children, and a man his friend or mistress, without first having to reckon up what there is in it for himself. That there are such things as social instincts and affections may, after Hutcheson, fairly be regarded as a settled point, though their defense had to wait for the theory of evolution to receive its final touch. But such a recognition still leaves a problem open which has always been a crucial one for English ethics. Granted that I have unselfish affections along with the self-centered ones, why should the former from the moral standpoint be supposed to have an advantage over the latter, so that I ought to prefer them when the two conflict. It is the practically universal judgment among British writers that such a superiority does exist; but the explanation gives them constant trouble.

Taken in the large, Hutcheson's solution is derived, as has been said, from Shaftesbury. The core of the moral apprehension is a judgment of reflection on affections or dispositions of the mind, and not the active propensities or desires themselves, or the pleasures at which desire aims—a judgment which finds expression in the hedonistically toned feeling of *approval*. Put in another way, the basis of the moral judgment is the existence, "proved only by an appeal to our hearts," of an objective difference of quality felt to be involved in human affections, acts, or dispositions. Hutcheson's criticism of the attempts to get along without

such an original sense of approval in feeling terms, and, in particular, his exposure of the obscurities involved in the intellectualist's claim that a mere perception of principles or relationships is sufficient to ground differences of relative value, is acute and on the whole convincing, and constitutes a distinct contribution to ethical theory. That he calls this source of approval a "moral sense" is possibly a little unfortunate, especially since the later vogue of the faculty philosophy tended to give the phrase a misleading implication. As a matter of fact, to think of the moral sense, or conscience, as a "faculty" which perceives immediately the truth of general moral principles would be to go back to a form of the intellectualism which Hutcheson was attacking. Hutcheson makes it plain that in speaking of a moral *sense* he intends putting no emphasis on the term except as a means of identification; all it is meant to stand for is the fact, open to anyone's observation, that when the normal man turns his attention to certain objects there do tend to make their appearance in his mind new feelings which affect his attitude toward such objects, prior to any conscious reflection on their nature, or on the external circumstances or consequences that attend them.[18]

There are several feelings of this sort. One is the feeling of appreciation which arises from a perception of beautiful objects, a feeling which Hutcheson, in opposition to the tendency to reduce beauty to an association of ideas, attempts in his earliest volume to show is too immediate to be thus accounted for. And in the same way when we contemplate a kindly deed or self-sacrificing action, we feel at once a glow of inner emotion which waits upon no sophisticated process of the intellect. Such approbation is not voluntary, and the reasons that determine it are not the same as those that excite to choice; while the approval in itself is pleasurable, we do not choose to approve because of this. Approval is to be compared, rather, to perception.

[18] *Cf. Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil,* Sec. I, Art. 8.

And like sense perception, it is in a way its own justification. If it is asked how we are to know that the moral sense is "right," or that we "approve our approbation," it is enough to answer, how do we know that we are pleased when we are pleased? If we are asked, again, how we can be sure the sense of approval will not change, we may appeal to the conviction that it is grounded in our constitution. Or if, finally, it is inquired how we know that all men have the same approvals, the answer is that we do *not* know for certain, though our acquaintance with humanity makes it probable.[19] It further should be noticed that the doctrine of a moral sense is not intended to supplant reason, but to supplement it. It does not supersede moral reflection. What it does is to supply the value notion necessary to the very conception of morality; without itself constituting a rule, it sets the ends which make rules possible.

6. The fuller elaboration of the psychological situation here briefly indicated runs as follows: There are, to start with, certain propensities or instincts in the animal frame from which sensations of pleasure and of pain arise; and the resulting pleasure is the stuff of which natural good consists. When natural pleasure or pain is reflected on, new pleasurable and painful feelings come about which are the source of the "affections." The apprehension of good in objects regarded as capable of attainment raises "desire," which is directed toward securing the agreeable sensation for ourselves or others; while reflection on the presence of good as already attained or as certain of attainment gives rise to the new feeling of joy. Desire and joy, along with their opposites, may be called spiritual or pure affections, as opposed to more tumultuous affections which are denominated "passions." The greatest and most perfect good is that whole series, or scheme of events, which contains a greater aggregate of happiness on the whole than any other

[19] *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense,* Sec. IV.

possible scheme, after subtracting all the evils connected with each of them. The realization of such an end is not automatic in man, and involves, along with instinct and emotion, intelligence and the use of standards. But intelligence or reason does not, as the intellectualists maintained, either set the aims of action, or constitute a motive for their realization. Its business is a secondary one—to scrutinize the circumstances which the accomplishment of ends involves. Indirectly reason may be said to constitute a motive, in so far as it persuades us to cultivate virtuous living by pointing out the advantages that will follow. But to say this is also to imply that reason is not ultimate; it presupposes the existence already of desire, and otherwise would have no hold upon us.[20]

On this raw material of conduct in the form of affections and passions, ethical or quasi-ethical judgments of approval now supervene to arrange them in a hierarchy of relative value. Primarily, the appropriate objects of moral approval are the benevolent feelings, or those affective dispositions in man which have in view an active promotion of the good of other rational beings.[21] The feeling called forth by these Hutcheson takes to be ultimate and unanalyzable; but any man can recognize it if he looks within. An act is virtuous only in so far as it proceeds, in part at least, from such a desire for the happiness of others; it becomes vicious when a mistaken self-interest or passion—otherwise neither morally good nor evil—overcomes our regard for the public good. The general welfare thus constitutes the moral standard; that action is best which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers. In this calculation, however, the agent himself must not be overlooked; an act which brings him greater evil than it brings good to others is

[20] *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections,* Sec. II, 1, 3; *Illustrations,* Sec. 1.

[21] *Cf. Inquiry,* II, 1; III, 5; *Passions and Affections,* II, 12.

founded on a wrong notion of the public benefit.[22] At this point there is some obscurity in Hutcheson's position. It is not quite evident what connection there is meant to be between the standard of the highest good and that which ranks the virtues, for in judging of a virtue it would seem that our own interest ought to be ignored. While self-love is in most actions an additional motive force, it detracts in so far from the moral loveliness of the act; and to find the essence of virtue we must deduct interest from benevolence.[23] Perhaps the reconciliation is that a man really himself enjoys the greatest pleasure in proportion to his benevolence and virtue, though the pleasure is not the *source* of his approval, and in order to get it he must aim only at the good of others.

It should be added that along with the benevolent virtues there are also various secondary objects of moral approval, in the form of dispositions such as sincerity, veracity, and fortitude, which, though not identical with benevolence, are closely allied with it. Here belongs the love of virtue itself, as this needs to be distinguished from that love of our fellow men which is the original source of virtue.[24] Finally, acts as well as dispositions may in an indirect way be morally approved, in proportion as the presence of moral affections is evidenced by them.

Meanwhile inside the field of morally good affections, also, there exists an order of comparative merit, based upon two further characteristics.[25] One of these is the degree of generality in the affection. We may have benevolent feelings toward individuals—on various grounds which nature has provided, such as kinship, propinquity, or friendship—toward larger groups, and toward the whole system of rational beings. All of these the moral sense approves. But

[22] *Inquiry*, III, 6.
[23] *Ibid.*, III, 11.
[24] *Cf. System of Moral Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 66-7 (London, 1755).
[25] *Cf. Inquiry*, III, 6, 9, 10, 15.

it approves them in different degrees; and the more general the affection the higher it ranks and the greater the authority it exerts. The love of one's father is thus recognized as morally good *per se,* but not as relatively good when it comes in conflict with the good of one's country or of mankind; though even then its natural loveliness affects our judgment, and we do not pronounce it wrong in the same unqualified way as when the source of the conflict is a selfish one.

The second point of difference is connected with Hutcheson's theory of the passions. The feelings *essentially* related to desire are the pleasures and pains that constitute its natural issue, along with, it would seem, the feelings of joy and sorrow, which are not themselves the things at which desire primarily aims, but an accompaniment of its success or failure. But also there are two other kinds of feeling that may be involved, so closely connected that possibly the two might be regarded as identical. One is the feeling of uneasiness that often accompanies desire, though it does not have to be present for desire to exist. The other is represented by the passions proper, which are a confused sensation of pleasure or pain that clings about desire, connected with violent bodily motions, and largely responsible for giving desire its bad name among the moralists.[26] These uneasy passions are not to be condemned outright. They have their place in the economy of nature, and are often needed, while reason is still immature, to get the results essential to self-preservation. But in proportion as the rational and truly ethical life develops, they require to be relegated to the background. They interfere with reason, in the first place, and prevent it from accomplishing its perfect work; and they add little or nothing to real happiness. It is true the feeling of joy may for the moment seem to be heightened because it has been preceded by the ferment of passionate desire. But this is not true of the

[26] *Passions and Affections,* I, 3; II, 1, 6.

solid satisfaction which is the proper outcome of desire; such satisfaction in reality is lessened, by reason of the disappointment we experience when we discover that it is not living up to the glowing advertisements of its advance agents. This is the ground of Hutcheson's frequent insistence on the familiar bit of ancient wisdom which tells us to expect but little in the way of future happiness and to prepare for future ills, since thus we avoid inevitable disappointment and are cheered now and then with pleasures on which we had not counted.[27]

It is in the light of these considerations that Hutcheson draws the distinction—a distinction playing a large part in his practical conclusions—between such affections as are adulterated with ethically dubious emotional disturbances, and the calm affections which allow reason full play, and so result in the most unalloyed happiness of which human nature is capable. The distinction applies to all the lower grades of generality in the benevolent affections. A particular affection like the love of offspring, or a more general affection such as love of country, may either be passionate or calm; and in the latter case it ranks higher as an element in happiness, and as an object of moral approbation. Moral development thus consists in accustoming ourselves to stand aside from the native desires and impulses, and to substitute for their tumultuous and unrestrained expression a calm desire of good as it appears to reason, in this way strengthening by reflective habituation the more general affections so that they shall take command over the less general. Hutcheson does not make it quite clear whether he supposes that the most general affection of all, the love of mankind, may also exist as a passion that needs purifying. But at any rate it is a combination of the two characteristics that sets the highest standard of virtue. The disposition which calls forth the most unqualified moral approval is a calm disinterested benevolence toward all rational beings.

[27] *Cf. ibid.*, IV, 5.

To this all other affections are subordinate, and its cultivation is the supreme goal of moral growth.

7. Meanwhile the conception of a natural order among the feelings based on differences of quality that cannot be reduced to quantitative differences of intensity, duration, or numbers even, is not confined by Hutcheson to the moral realm; and this needs to be taken into account in any final estimate of his psychology.[28] The notion of the moral sense had first been suggested by Shaftesbury's doctrine of the æsthetic nature of goodness; and at times it would not be difficult to get the impression that for Hutcheson, also, the two feelings are much the same. As a matter of fact, however, there is a difference between them. The sense of beauty and the moral sense agree in that both are separate from self-interest, and both arise immediately without reflection; but their objects are not identical, and each feeling is a feeling *sui generis*. Furthermore along with beauty he came to recognize several other affections which are the source of a qualitative ranking, but which equally need to be distinguished from the moral sense as such. There is, for example, the feeling of sympathy with the pleasures and pains of others, which differs from the moral sense in that it need involve no active response in the way of duty; and there are the feelings of honor and of shame, which are affections aroused by the liking or the dislike which others show for those qualities in us that the moral sense approves, and which supply additional motives that may be called into service in the interest of virtue.

A consideration of these additions which Hutcheson felt compelled to make in order to cover the facts of experience may reasonably arouse, however, some distrust of the finality of his analysis. To take the qualitative sense of moral approval as an ultimate and unanalyzable datum may seem to have some justification so long as it can be supposed to offer a sufficient explanation of the various aspects of the moral life. But when we are forced to add to such ultimate

[28] *Ibid.*, I, 1.

sentiments indefinitely—even the natural abilities have a characteristic relish for reflection[29]—the multiplying of original principles begins to go too far for comfort.

And the suspicion here is strengthened by one final instance. There is a sentiment which is bound to develop a considerable importance in any attempt to rank objects in the order of their qualitative merit—the sense of relative dignity, or decency, or worthiness. Hutcheson's treatment of this is uncertain and confused. In his earlier volume it is implied at times, but not very clearly singled out. In the *Compendium* it appears as an actual part of the definition of the moral sense, in a loose sort of combination with the chief distinguishing feature of moral goodness—benevolence. But in the more exact treatment found in the *Conduct of the Passions* and in the *System of Moral Philosophy,* it is for the most part, though not always, separated from morality, and takes its place along with beauty and sympathy as still another ultimate "relish" of the mind.[30] Here, however, the difficulties involved in the method of isolating analytic elements and leaving each to shift for itself becomes fairly evident; the quality in question is so entangled with the whole conception of approval and of qualitative rank as to make the need for a more careful analysis imperative.[31]

Such a need is emphasized also by a natural doubt as to the right of benevolent feelings to form the sole object of the moral preference. For one thing, our attitude toward benevolence itself appears to stand at times on a purely naturalistic level, and to be empirically no different from the liking we have for other qualities. I may relish the affection of a child for its mother without of necessity having to think of this as any more "morally" good than is the child's natural simplicity and candor, for which I also have a

[29] *Inquiry,* III, 10.

[30] *Intro. to Moral Philosophy,* Ch. i, p. 10; *Passions and Affections,* I, 1; *System,* Vol. I, pp. 27, 64.

[31] *Cf. Passions and Affections,* Sec. V, Art. X, 4, where the perception of an "internal dignity and worth" is attributed to the moral sense.

liking.[32] Indeed Hutcheson really grants this when he holds that particular affections may be overruled by more general ones. For if my love for an individual may express itself in a morally wrong act when it injures society, the source of the specifically moral judgment has been placed elsewhere than in the mere sense of liking which attaches to the affection as such. A natural good—among which the benevolent affections undoubtedly belong—becomes a moral good only when also it is something that we "ought to do."

But duty is a concept of which Hutcheson gives no adequate account; he takes for granted that the object of approval has a dignity and commanding nature from which the obligation to action follows as a matter of course. And naturally this will be the case if by approval we mean moral approval, and if the idea of moral approval itself includes a claim on conduct.[33] But also, if obligatoriness belongs to the notion of approval, this last is not simple but compound; and if there are different species under the genus "approval," of one of which the differentia is the "ought," something in the way of an explanation still is due.

And this leads to the further recognition that not only are the benevolent affections capable of calling forth approval in the merely naturalistic sense, but also that moral approval attaches to other things than kindly dispositions. A man may feel that he ought not to be a coward or a sneak, or that he ought to be clean and self-respecting, without at the same time having to envisage any feeling of affection toward his family or toward the race. No doubt the social plays a larger part than any other single element in the make-up of the moral experience. But on the surface it is not the whole of morality. And while the surface appearance may turn out to be deceptive, to establish this will at least need a more explicit proof than Hutcheson attempts to give.

[32] *Cf. ibid.*, Sec. I, Art. I, 4.
[33] *Inquiry,* VII, 1; *System,* Vol. I, p. 61.

CHAPTER X

THE ETHICS OF SENTIMENT (*continued*)

HUME · ADAM SMITH

1. THE ethics of sentiment, started by Shaftesbury and further developed by Hutcheson, was next to receive the powerful support of the greatest of the British empiricists, David Hume. Hume's contribution to the specific doctrine of the moral sense is, indeed, less weighty than might have been expected from so penetrating an analyst; he rather deprecates too nice a discrimination in his conceptual formulas, and falls noticeably short of Hutcheson in appreciating and dealing with the psychological problems which the theory raises. His special interest appears to be, like that of Shaftesbury before him, to controvert the popular persuasion that all the virtues have their foundation in self-love. At least this is true of the *Inquiry;* in the *Treatise* he is shown more in his proper character as a detached theorist with no particular axe to grind. But in refuting the theory of self-love, Hume was led to bring into the foreground two new aspects of the ethical situation, prophetic of the next turn that ethical theory was to take.

Hume proposes to apply to ethics a method which is in the strictest sense empirical. Moral judgments exist in human experience. We find men as a matter of fact viewing with affection and regard a number of things in human conduct and human character—justice, honesty, temperance, gratitude, and a long list of other qualities. The philosopher accepts this list from common opinion. But it is far too diffuse and miscellaneous for him as it stands. Why, he is bound to ask himself, should we adopt an iden-

tical attitude toward so large a variety of objects? It is unlikely that for each virtue there exists a special human faculty that can be appealed to as an ultimate explanation; this would be to multiply faculties beyond reason. More probably, some quality or group of qualities common to the various virtues is responsible for the similarity in our attitude toward them all. The first business that suggests itself to the philosopher is, then, to discover if possible what such a common attribute may be.

In the answer to this question, the first of the two new concepts makes its appearance. Among the qualities that constitute what is commonly recognized as "personal merit," certain social attributes rank high; and a part at least of the merit of these social virtues comes from their *utility*. In the case of various artificial or secondary forms of excellence which men have grown accustomed to accept as if they were good on their own account, an examination will reveal that they derive their entire merit from their public usefulness. And a similar inquiry shows that, as utility is the *sole* cause of the moral approbation paid to fidelity, justice—by which Hume means the contractual rules that govern property relations—veracity, integrity, and chastity, so it likewise has a very large part to play in the merit ascribed to humanity, benevolence, friendship, public spirit, and, in general, the social virtues which are not mere means to a further end, but for which a natural source can be discovered in the immediate appeal they make to some native disposition or affection.[1]

Hume thus has some claim to be regarded as a forerunner of the Utilitarianism which later was to capture English ethical theory for a time. It is true the notion of the general happiness as a standard is present in nearly every one of his predecessors; but it had not previously, even by Cumberland, been accentuated quite so sharply. Before classifying Hume with Bentham, however, one needs to

[1] *Inquiry,* Secs. I-III; *Treatise,* Bk. III, Pt. III, Sec. I.

note the wide difference of background. It is not in the sentiment we feel toward utility that the classical Utilitarian is interested, but in utility itself, as a social norm by which he may condemn and supplant what he regards as socially undesirable customs and opinions. From this reforming zeal Hume is completely free. What he wants to show is that our approval of utility is an argument against taking self-love as the fundamental human motive —a denial in which, it may be observed, Bentham did not follow him. And in carrying out this purpose Hume is so far from making utility a tool of critical discrimination, that he offers a conspicuous example of that appeal to conventional forms of sentiment which Bentham deprecates. In the picture which he draws of the ethical life, Virtue and Vice stand in their accepted and relatively uncomplicated forms as traditional opponents, and the business of the moralist is not to throw light on what is already plain, but to recommend virtue as the path to happiness.

In comparing Hume with the Utilitarians, it is further to be noticed that, while social utility is a very important ingredient of virtue, it is not its final differentia. In addition to qualities which are socially useful, there are three other captions under which Hume lists the content of personal merit—qualities useful to the individual, those immediately agreeable to the individual, and those immediately agreeable to others. It has just been remarked that, in dealing with the distinctively social virtues, Hume's intention is to show that they give rise to a sentiment of liking or approval independent of any personal advantage to the observer. The utility which lends merit to the act is not that which affects ourselves, but usefulness to those others who are served by the conduct we approve; [2] at times even, as in the case of a generous, brave, or noble deed performed by an adversary, we may approve conduct whose consequences are likely to be prejudicial to our own par-

[2] *Inquiry,* Sec. V, Pt. I.

ticular interest. And the same thing is true of the remaining three classes. Thus qualities that are useful to an individual irrespective of their more general effect upon society—industry, frugality, sobriety, patience, presence of mind—are subject to an entirely disinterested approval; in fact it is still harder to reduce these to self-love than it is the social virtues, in the degree that they are lacking in the more diffusive good effects which issue from justice and benevolence, and in which, as a member of society, I personally may expect to share.[3] Meanwhile the particular point we started out to notice is that the empirically distinguishing mark of a virtue is not after all to be found in utility, as Hume had seemed on the point of saying, since there are other things which share the honor with it. In reality it is not *any* quality intrinsic to the virtuous object on which in the end his actual definition turns; a virtue, his final formula runs, is "whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation."[4] The essence of virtue is thus the feeling which it excites in the perceiving mind.

2. At this point two questions will come up, connected but distinguishable. We may inquire how it happens that we are able to approve a feeling which exists not in ourselves but in another man; or we may ask what we *mean* by a sentiment of approval. In the case of the former question. Hume's treatment is reasonably straightforward; the answer is, through *sympathy*. We are so constituted that when we recognize the existence of a feeling in another man, this has a natural tendency to excite a similar feeling in ourselves; and to the contagious property which happiness or misery thus possesses of spreading beyond its native boundaries, we are to attribute that capacity for taking an interest in the pleasures and pains of other men to which a very large proportion of the virtues have been shown to owe their existence, without its being at all necessary to

[3] Sec. VI, Pt. I.

[4] *Ibid.*, Appendix I.

appeal to the indirect effects on my own pleasure in terms of self-love.[5]

The notion of sympathy which thus for the first time is made to play a leading rôle was destined to have a continuing influence on ethical speculation. Its real force for Hume's own doctrine does not, however, grow more clear upon examination. And in trying to see what its meaning really is we may first distinguish, more carefully than Hume himself has done, two characteristic aspects of the sympathetic experience.

One of these is the *active* tendency toward forms of social behavior. It is this that more modern biological theories of sympathy are disposed to emphasize; and naturally, since ethics deals with conduct, it is present in the background of Hume's treatment also, though his account of it does not lend itself to a very clear-cut statement. At times, and for working purposes more particularly, it appears as an original disposition or instinct through which we feel a desire for the happiness of others, as in hunger we feel a desire for food, and which must first be presupposed before we can get from it the pleasure that thereupon gives rise to a secondary conscious motive.[6] This is closer to the facts than it is to the sensationalistic psychology to which Hume elsewhere is committed—a psychology for which "instincts" have a very dubious standing. In his earlier and fuller discussion in the *Treatise,* therefore, sympathy tends more consistently to appear as an "idea," originated through "contagion," and brought to the vivacity of an impression by connection with the idea of the self.[7] Even this can hardly get along on a purely sensationalistic basis. Hume's most enlightening illustrations of the contagion which produces sympathy are in terms of the response of one man to the emotional *behavior* of others; and such emotional expressions bring us back again to a machinery

[5] *Ibid.,* Sec. V, Pt. II. [6] *Cf. Inquiry,* Appendix II.
[7] *Treatise,* Bk. II, Pt. II; Bk. III, Pt. III, Sec. I.

of instinct. However, the inadequacy of Hume's psychology here is of minor importance; in any case it is the second aspect of sympathy which most nearly concerns his ethical doctrine.

We are to think of sympathy, then, not primarily as a disposition to social *action,* but as a passive feeling of community with the happiness or misery of others. Such a feeling, since it is the replica of a pleasure or a pain, is itself pleasurable or the opposite; and it may, in consequence, furnish a motive to benevolent conduct also, in order to continue or to reproduce itself. Nevertheless in the first instance it takes the form not of a desire or motive, but of a judgment of reflection or of contemplation; it is, in other words, the sentiment of approval or of condemnation to whose presence Hume attributes the perception of virtue.

But when sympathy is taken not as benevolence, but as the *approval* of benevolence, it becomes doubtful to what extent the social emphasis ought still to be regarded as psychologically the fundamental one. Hume continues for the most part to talk as if humanitarianism were the essence of virtuousness, just as social utility remains his chief interest in connection with the content of the virtuous act, even when other forms of virtue are admitted to exist. But in reality it is not its social reference which lends its most distinctive quality to approval. The judgment that a certain thing is good is marked off from desire and selfish interest, not because the object is another man's pleasure, but because the judgment itself is a *disinterested* one; and it is able to be disinterested simply because it has passed from the realm of active desire to that of contemplation or imagination. As soon as we recognize, however, that the condition of approval is its *imaginative* form, we see that the original ownership of a feeling which we happen to approve is irrelevant. The important thing is that I should be able to stand off from the feeling and view it without

bias; and I can do this to feelings of my own as well as to those of others.

As a matter of fact the actual reason which Hume himself gives, when he tries to justify his procedure in confining virtue to the "social" good, moves in a different field from that either of approval or of motivation; it is a consideration in terms of *language*. The primitive sentiments, that is, are too closely tied to my private interest and individual standpoint to be readily conveyed to others; for the needs of common intercourse it becomes necessary to correct their variations and to standardize them. If my words of praise and blame are to have any stable meaning for my fellows, they must no longer express a mere personal feeling, but must come to stand for judgments felt by all alike. When we say, therefore, that morality deals with social and not with selfish good, we are merely saying that for human intercourse some *general* system of praise and blame is called for; and to speak a general language one must cease to be occupied with merely private and particular ends.[8]

3. If we try now to straighten out the implications of Hume's analysis, the outcome can be made to take a form much simpler than that in which Hume leaves it. Approval has been seen to be the pleasure we take in viewing in imagination certain objects that constitute personal merit. Prominent among these objects are the qualities useful to mankind; but other qualities also have a place. And if Hume had carried to the end the task he set himself, and had asked what empirically we find is common to *all* the objects of approval, there is only one answer he could very well have given. The ultimate thing which we approve, and which makes utility itself a good, is *pleasure*—not *my* pleasure, nor, for that matter, the pleasure of my fellow beings, but pleasure itself, as something that not only constitutes the final object of desire, but that in its very nature is agreeable to contemplation also.[9]

[8] *Inquiry*, Sec. IX, Pt. I.

[9] *Cf. Inquiry*, Appendix I, 5.

And so far as it goes, such a result would perhaps have a claim on our acceptance. But it does not go far enough. What at best has been accounted for is, not moral virtue, but goodness in the large; and there are many things to which we may apply the adjective "good" besides objects of moral preference. That there is a lack of strict accuracy here, Hume's initial assumption that virtue can be identified with "personal merit" would suggest. He himself notes that a possible objection might be made to calling natural abilities, such as wit or eloquence, "virtuous"; but he dismisses the objection.[10] It may be true that the sentiment toward justice differs in a measure from the sentiment toward wit. But it is also true that it is not identically the same as that toward benevolence, though justice and benevolence both are plainly virtues. Hume grants there is a narrower usage of the term, which chiefly regards the qualities that are thought to have a special social value. But there is no sharp dividing line; and the whole question becomes a purely verbal one. This is too casual, however, to do real justice to the situation. Even differences of language usage need to be accounted for; and to carry them back, as Hume seems disposed to do, to unexplained peculiarities in the feelings that constitute approval, is scarcely more satisfactory than to appeal to a similar variety of original "faculties." If there are differences in the genus approval, these call for a further explanation.

And the fact pretty clearly is that before a good turns into a *moral* good at least one added ingredient is needed, which only certain goods possess; we must be able to feel it, namely, as an obligation or a duty. But to the nature of the "ought" Hume gives a very sketchy treatment, as might have been expected from one of his peculiar temper. This was a stranger, largely, to the more strenuous aspects of the moral consciousness. To Hume the sense of sin, the agonies of remorse, the call to self-sacrifice, are chiefly

[10] *Inquiry,* Appendix IV; *Treatise,* Bk. III, Pt. III, Sec. IV.

appendages to the gloomy superstitions of the past, which to the enlightened philosopher are now little more than psychological curiosities; it is not the least important consequence following from his own doctrine that useful or agreeable qualities are the source of personal merit, that it enables us to see in their true light the claims of celibacy, fasting, penance, self-denial, humility, and the whole train of monkish virtues. For genuine virtue, nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, benevolence, affability; her sole purpose is to make her votaries and all mankind, during every instant of their existence, if possible, cheerful and happy.[11] For a mood like this, obligation can only mean the claim to preference which the more generous, expansive, and social life has over a narrower and selfish scheme, by reason of its greater contribution to the happiness and welfare of the agent; or, in feeling terms, the displeasure which a neglect to act in accordance with this claim entails.

Against the whole standpoint which underlies Hume's theory, the general objection will be brought that it reduces the validity of the moral judgment to the mere existence of a feeling in this or that person's mind. In a sense Hume grants this; and in the *Treatise* he seems rather to enjoy stating his doctrine in a way to call attention to its paradoxical character. Vice and virtue, so he tells us, are not qualities in objects, but principles in the mind, so that in calling an action vicious we mean nothing but that from the constitution of our nature we have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Moreover, it might be argued, this is the only thing he has a *right* to mean, since his philosophy allows for nothing real over and above the ebb and flow of particular impressions and images.

But this would be to overlook the fact that there is a side of Hume other than the skeptical side. As a philosopher seeking demonstrative evidence he sees no ground for human beliefs that cannot be reduced to sensations and

[11] *Inquiry*, Sec. IX.

their associations. Nevertheless he presupposes everywhere that men consistently make postulates which leave these narrow limits far behind; and for all practical purposes, he himself accepts these postulates. Accordingly in ethics he professes, honestly it would seem, not to be casting doubt on moral beliefs; he is simply asking what, on the assumption of their general validity, they actually on scrutiny amount to. Their justification may be no more than that we find them existing empirically as parts of human experience. But this empirical proof itself prevents us from calling them "relative" in a merely individual sense; whatever the range of variations, the facts still show a substantial identity of judgment, pointing to an "eternal frame and constitution" of our animal nature.[12]

4. The last systematic attack upon the ethical situation in the form of a psychology of the moral sentiment is that of Adam Smith. The attempt as a whole has had no large historical influence. The utilitarian emphasis of Hume for the time being carried the day; and in any case Smith's theory is not of a sort to win numerous followers. The *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* is, for an ethical treatise, good reading, by reason of its wealth of concrete psychological illustration; but in the end the doctrine which it presents becomes so involved as to be capable of being held before the mind only by a considerable mental effort.

Smith's analysis centers about the fact of *sympathy*. The starting-point of morals is the ability to put ourselves imaginatively in another man's place, and to feel an emotion called forth by an identical situation. When the sentiment thus aroused in us is approximately the same as that which we observe in our neighbor, the perception of the identity is the occasion of a pleasure, and we are said in consequence to enter into sympathy with, or approve, his emotional attitude. Next, having once had this experience with reference to others, we come to realize that they like-

[12] *Ibid.*, Appendix I, 5.

wise are adopting the same attitude toward ourselves; and thereupon there is set up in our own breast a reflection of the impartial appraisal with which they view us, and we come to judge our own motives and feelings as a disinterested public might. This impartial spectator and umpire, this man within the breast, who stands apart from our more impassioned and less reflective selves and views them as outsiders would view them, is the psychological source of the "moral sense," for which we need, accordingly, to invent no special faculty.[13]

To this we now may add one further feature—the merit or demerit of an act, by which Smith means that quality in a moral situation which is felt to deserve reward or punishment. Here the result is secured by a double act of sympathy. When, that is, we see one man doing a service or disservice to another, we are able to enter not only into the feelings of the agent, but also into the emotion which the act occasions in the party of the second part, and so to share his gratitude or indignation; in this way we arrive at the notion of good or ill desert. And when this new notion is brought to bear upon ourselves through the meditation of the man within the breast, we are in the presence of the moral conscience in its full meaning; we experience the sense of obligation and the satisfaction or remorse that comes from vice or virtue.[14]

Smith believes that such an analysis corrects the one-sidedness of previous theories, while nevertheless finding a place for the relative truth that all of them contain. In the aspect of appropriateness between the feeling and the situation that arouses it, we have the element of intellectual fitness or proportion on which theories of rationalism have been based. Along with this the emotional ingredient likewise gets its rights, in terms of familiar psychological facts, however, and without having to call in the doubtful

[13] *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Pt. I, Sec. I, Ch. iii; Pt. III, Ch. i.
[14] Pt. II, Sec. I, Chs. i, v.

hypothesis of a special moral sense. Finally, the philosophers of utility are not wholly in the wrong. There is no need to recognize consequences every time we pass a moral judgment; and in the first instance this judgment is a direct and instinctive expression of human nature based on identity of feeling. But indirectly consequences will be present that compel recognition; and these enforce or modify the original emotional reactions.

5. In looking now more closely at the details of Smith's theory, we first need to give attention to the account of sympathy. This represents a significant advance over that of Hume. Sympathy is conceived as originating not as a transfer to ourselves of passions which we note in others. It is an envisaging of the objective situation which our neighbor confronts, so that it calls forth in us independently its due emotional reaction; [15] a view of the facts may arouse us to indignation for a man's wrongs even when he does not feel it himself. Accordingly we are not said to sympathize with another man's feeling simply through perceiving it to exist; we must be aware of it as more or less in harmony with that which arises in ourselves when we put ourselves imaginatively in his place. Our neighbor's pride of achievement meets no full response in the mood of the observer, and vanity, therefore, is condemned. In the same way violent grief fails to carry the spectator along with it, and seems exorbitant; it is only grief subdued to a pitch that does not clash too much with the more moderate response of one who has not himself suffered loss which strikes us as normal and proper, and with which we are said to sympathize. So equally we disapprove if the emotion fails to reach a height that is easily attainable by an outsider, as when a benefit conferred arouses no gratitude in the recipient.

An example such as that of our sympathy with sorrow will, however, start questions about Smith's theory. It

[15] *Cf.* pp. 33, 109 (12th ed., Glasgow, 1809).

suggests strongly that what the analysis most readily applies to is something rather different from morality. It is not the emotion which is judged, that is, but propriety in the *expression* of emotion. I should plainly not be justified at all in asking other people in a real situation to experience an emotion no more poignant than that which I feel in an imaginary and disinterested one; in fact I should condemn a man who suffered no more keenly from the death of a friend than I do when I extend to him my condolences. What we do have a right to ask is that he shall not by an unrestrained expression of his grief impose his feelings on others who cannot feel them as he does—that he should respect the social conventions which are meant to provide a common language of emotional expression suitable to the requirements of intercourse. A surprisingly large number of Smith's illustrations move in this plane of social propriety, where the important thing is not the nature of our feelings, but the conformity of their self-revelation to the demands of good taste. It is this that accounts for the peculiar eminence he assigns to the "severe" virtue of self-command, which lends, he thinks, its chief luster to the moral life.[16] Self-command he conceives primarily as a virtue of social communication, which derives its merit from our admiration of the restraint a man shows in bringing down his emotions into the view of the spectator. But this very admiration assumes that it is natural for the agent to have feelings much stronger than he shows the world, or no effort is involved in self-restraint. So in the case of other virtues. It may very well be, Smith concedes, that what a man *really* loves best is himself; the point is that if he is to win the approval of the spectator he will not dare confess to this, but must moderate the revelation of his interest in himself to conform to the place he holds in the esteem of others.

Now if the thing to be accounted for is propriety in the

[16] Pt. I, Sec. I, Ch. v; Pt. VI, Sec. III.

expression of emotions in polite society, certain prominent features of Smith's theory will, indeed, fall in place; but these are not features on the whole that recommend it as a moral thesis. More particularly, we have to note its tendency to lower the pitch of the moral feelings to the level of the participant least vitally concerned; propriety, as Smith remarks, must lie in a certain mediocrity. It is understandable why this should be approved as a matter of social usage; we are rendered uncomfortable if we are expected to respond to feelings too warm for our more detached mood to enter into easily. But can the same thing safely be transferred to *moral* judgments? Here it would be natural to suppose that the person closest to the situation will have some advantage in judging its emotional significance, and that even if he be apt to import more into it than a disinterested judgment would confirm, the mere spectator will equally be liable unduly to devitalize it, and render it conventional and commonplace.

6. To determine whether Smith has shown any way to even the scale between these two dangers, it will be necessary to disentangle more explicitly some distinctions involved in his theory. And first it is important to observe that while we start out by approving other people in the degree in which our feeling, in an imaginary situation, corresponds with theirs in an actual one, it is not till we have taken the second step, and by putting ourselves in their place have adopted their disinterested estimate of our own conduct, that we really emerge into a moral atmosphere. The involutary sympathy which goes forth to those who show feelings neither too strong nor too weak for us to share is not as yet a moral phenomenon; not only does it often fail to measure up to the real emotional demands of the situation, but the motive power it supplies is quite inadequate. Smith finds the essence of "approval" in the pleasure that comes from recognizing the agreement between another's

feeling and our own.[17] But this clearly is a pleasure too tepid and too fleeting to furnish a basis for morality; while its relation to the needs of conduct is no closer than numerous other agreements and disagreements that might be mentioned. The practice of viewing ourselves from the standpoint of the impartial and disinterested spectator is, however, a consideration of a different order; and this *is* a factor of real importance in the ethical experience.

But disinterestedness is a term open to two interpretations. It may carry the suggestion that the spectator takes no personal interest in the matter; and when Smith emphasizes the "mediocrity" of the sympathetic judgment, his illustrations not infrequently suggest such a lack of interest. Complete indifference would, however, deprive the judgment of its content. What Smith must really mean is, not that the observer is *un*interested, but that he is in the proper sense *dis*interested. He has no private ends, that is, to serve; though he must take an *imaginative* interest in the situation, or it would arouse in him no emotion of his own to bring into the comparison.

But from this it would seem in strictness that a change of emphasis ought to follow. It may still be so that I cannot truly sympathize beyond the degree in which my own emotion is aroused, or at least the degree in which I conceive it would be aroused were I in my neighbor's place. But this presupposes logically, prior to the judgment that passes on the congruity between the two emotions, an earlier judgment involving what Smith calls the "appropriateness of the feeling to the situation." And while I may be inspired to pass this prior judgment by observing an emotional experience in another man, the judgment itself, which determines whether or not I shall approve his emotion as right or natural, rests not on comparing my feeling with another's, but on finding out what my own

[17] *Cf.* p. 80, Note.

emotional reaction is. This is the pith of the whole matter. And what it is specially important to observe is that the result is not a standard product determined automatically by the fact that it takes place in the mind of a spectator. It is a variable between wide limits, depending partly on the emotional susceptibility of the particular observer, and partly on the degree of his success in realizing the situation imaginatively. In any case, since a given sentiment is to be regarded as right, accurate, and agreeable to truth and reality in so far as it corresponds with ours, the thing primarily to be explained is the manner in which our own standard is originally settled.

It is here probably we are to look for what is most central and characteristic in Smith's theory. There are two ways in which the query might be answered. One is in terms of imaginative sensitivity, or of the type of moral judgment which responds with most accuracy and refinement to the elements of value inherent in a given situation. But this to most people will appear too indefinite, unauthoritative, and individual a standard. And the alternative is to find moral good in a "union of approvals"—the kind of judgment men generally may be expected to pass. In both cases a measure of sympathetic imagination is presupposed. But it will be a much lower measure in the second case, since the possibilities of a disinterested sympathy are in the average man too small, and too leavened with indifference, to raise a common standard much above "mediocrity."

The same thing may be put in different terms by saying that the impartial spectator and judge, the man within the breast, might be regarded either as the apotheosis of an outside approval transferred indirectly to ourselves through sympathy, or as an ideal set by our own moral insight at its best. Now many of the difficulties Smith's theory presents are due to his reluctance to discard either alternative completely. The former is the way he usually tends to put

the matter. We are under no real necessity, however, of always arriving at our moral judgments *via* a social medium. In genetic terms it may be true that society is the mirror in which we are enabled to see our own features. But psychologically its place, though important, does not seem to be essential. Since what I do is to imagine some situation not for the moment real, there is no reason why I should not put myself directly in this imaginary situation without having first to envisage the way it would look to my neighbor. To see myself as others see me really means, at bottom, not to reproduce some actual judgment, but to view myself without bias as the facts demand. And this last requirement is met in so far as imagination frees me from the pressure of actual and present interests that may prejudice me too much on my own side; to suppose that in a moral sense we can condemn ourselves only through "sympathy with the hatred or abhorrence of others" is to revert to the less adequate account of sympathy as having "feelings" for its object. If to condemn the "propriety" of passions is to see them as "extravagantly disproportionate to the value of their object," this is something for which we do not have to take the word of another. It would be impossible to transfer the judgment of our neighbor to ourselves in any true sense without first in our own heart feeling the judgment's force; and such a perception, though it may be facilitated, is not constituted by the views of other people. The same thing follows from a different angle. A man's love of virtue, Smith remarks, involves not only a desire for approbation, but a desire of being what *ought* to be approved of, or of what he himself approves in other men.[18] But we approve qualities in other men, not through any appeal to a general judgment, but by acting ourselves independently as judge; and so again our private sense of value is the starting-point.

We may conclude, then, that two distinguishable motives

[18] P. 167.

enter into Smith's position—motives which he fails to bring into a complete accord. He wishes for one thing to account for a standard such as governs the generally accepted judgments of morality; and he finds this in a sort of average view which men whose own interests are not involved take of the conduct of others—a judgment which then they naturally extend, in theory at least, to include themselves. Here belongs Smith's distinctive ethical contribution; the notion of the impartial spectator and judge, the great demigod within the breast, is primarily the notion of public opinion transferred by sympathy into the individual's inner life, so that he appears in a sense to be two selves—a higher and a lower self—combined in one.

But along with this another notion also is constantly emerging. Here the impartial spectator appears, not as an outsider, even a universal outsider like "mankind," but as the man himself in his own higher reaches. We no longer disapprove ourselves simply because others disapprove us; our conduct now arouses in us directly the emotions due its nature, and looking back we blush at our folly, or find ourselves as detestable as our neighbors found us.[19] And therewith the whole tone of the moral emotion insensibly is heightened. We cease to find it necessary to level down the moral judgment in order to satisfy the casual bystander. With approval now dependent on the capacities of the agent himself, his best and not his average insight is encouraged; and virtue appears not as propriety or good taste, but in its diviner form as "the love of what is honorable and noble, of the grandeur, and dignity, and superiority of our own characters." [20] From such a motive, and not from social pressure or from the "feeble spark of benevolence," virtuous or social conduct in the true sense really springs.

7. As affecting theory, the difference just noticed makes its appearance in Smith's pages in two chief forms. It is involved, in the first place, in the important distinction he

[19] Pt. VI, Conclusion. [20] P. 189.

draws between the love of praise and the love of praiseworthiness.[21] The former represents the motive most naturally suggested by his usual emphasis; if the voice of conscience is the voice of popular opinion, a regard for the blame or approval of our fellows would appear to constitute its motive force. But with this Smith is not content. True self-approval, the love of which is the love of virtue, springs not from the applause that follows our actions, but from that which *ought* to follow; it is justified not by the praise of men, but only as it can stand before a higher tribunal than man's judgment. The method by which this transition is to be effected, however, Smith does not make plain; and it necessarily will remain obscure until the notion of the man within the breast as a reflection into ourselves, through sympathy, of the judgment of the average bystander definitely gives place to that of a sensitive valuation by the moral expert, who in the last resort must be identical with the moral agent himself.

The existence of a problem here would seem to be recognized in one further aspect of Smith's theory. It appears that after all for him "propriety," with which he mainly is concerned, falls short of "virtue"; and the difference between the two involves precisely that heightening of tone in which the judgment of the spectator is likely to be deficient. For to have virtue we must add "merit" to propriety; to be virtuous is to be not only amiable, but deserving.[22] Put in a different way, virtue is distinguished from mere propriety in that it calls for admiration as well as for approval. In a common degree of moral quality there is no virtue. Virtue stands for excellence, for something uncommonly great or beautiful; and it involves, therefore, not only sympathy—or the absence of any clash of feelings—but wonder and surprise as well.[23]

The recognition of a need for something to correct and supplement the cool approval of the disinterested onlooker

[21] Pp. 167-8. [22] P. 163. [23] Pp. 44, 51, 83.

is here explicit. It is less clear that the doctrine of "sympathy" can be utilized to meet the need; the appearance of a solution is provided only by using "merit" in two different senses. Merit is originally defined as equivalent to "deserving of reward"; and if we take "desert" as the quality that gives rise to gratitude, it may be explained through a sympathetic reflection of the feelings of the beneficiary. But a sympathetic approval of gratitude or of indignation has the same likelihood of being tepid and mediocre that other approvals have. To give to virtue its true emotional force we need to change the definition of merit, and to make it mean, not "deserving of reward," but "deserving of admiration." This will enable us to escape the charge of mediocrity. But it is at the expense of theoretical consistency; for admiration is a feeling which we do not reflect from others, but supply from our own emotional resources.

On the whole Smith's actual ethical judgments tend to follow the logic of sympathy rather than of admiration, and to hold moral enthusiasms to a very moderate level. The content of the ethical ideal, as he views it, carries little glamour, and presupposes everywhere the respectable British citizen rather than a sensitive individual conscience or an impressive individual character. It is tempting to go a little further, and to see in Smith the representative, in ethics as in economics, of the new industrial society. God judged that "the interest of the great society of mankind would be best promoted by directing the principal attention of each individual to that particular portion of it which was most within the sphere both of his abilities and of his understanding"; the administration of the grand system of the universe and the care of the universal happiness are God's business, and not man's. Admiration for success and wealth and greatness are moral duties, since on these the providential order of society depends. It is true that inequalities exist. But we may easily exaggerate them; "take the whole earth at an average, for one man who suffers pain

or misery you will find twenty in prosperity and joy, or at least in tolerable circumstances." The rich man is after all very little better off than the rest of us, if we will only see it in this light, and cultivate tranquillity and content. The rich are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life which would have been made had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants; without intending it they advance, therefore, the interests of a society in which, in the real happiness that comes from ease of body and peace of mind, all ranks are very much on a level.[24]

[24] Pp. 191, 203-6, 251-2, 313, 322, 344.

CHAPTER XI

MORAL REALISM: A DIGRESSION

MANDEVILLE

1. IN dealing with the development of English ethics it has been customary for the historian at this point to turn aside long enough to give a perfunctory notice to the one-time notorious author of the *Fable of the Bees.* To what extent the digression is justified may be a matter of dispute. Certainly the influence Mandeville can be shown to have had on subsequent speculation is at best a devious one, except as his name became a byword and a hissing to all proper-minded thinkers; and even among recent critics, therefore, who have had a chance to outgrow the prejudices which he excited in his own day, the more common impression seems to be that he was a rather eccentric and shallow-minded writer of no permanent importance, who reaped a far greater fame than he deserved by exploiting an economic sophism.

That this last judgment is a hasty one will be evident to the unbiased reader who takes the trouble to go through Mandeville's pages with any care. Along with a sense of humor and a keen satirical touch, he is the possessor of a mind vigorous and versatile, and on the whole of a surprisingly modern cast. It has to be admitted that his value for ethics is more equivocal. It is not even an easy matter to decide just what it is he has set out to do, and what he thinks he has accomplished. Nevertheless the chances seem to be that he is a more significant figure than the customary notices would imply, though this significance may need to

be looked for in a direction rather different from the one in which it is commonly sought.

The general drift of Mandeville's original thesis is sufficiently suggested in his subtitle, *Private Vices Public Benefits*. The story is that of a flourishing colony of bees who had been infected with the virus of reform, and who, having all become sober, frugal, and honest overnight, found to their dismay that they also had destroyed initiative and prosperity, deprived the needy of employment, and in general reduced the community to a state of virtuous, but stupid and comfortless, poverty. And out of this thesis, primarily an economic one, Mandeville also seems to draw an ethical conclusion as well, namely, that virtue is a specious product approaching closely to hypocrisy, and that so-called virtuous acts are really due not to reason, or social feeling, or a disinterested sense of duty, but to the hidden working of certain vices, and in particular the vice of pride —in one place he defines the moral virtues as the political offspring which flattery begot upon pride—which keep in check the more unsocial passions by their counterforce. To quote, for example, Mandeville's receipt for that highly prized virtue, martial courage: "First take care they are persuaded of the justice of their cause; for no man fights heartily who thinks himself in the wrong; then show them that their altars, their possessions, wives, children, and everything that is near and dear to them, are concerned in the present quarrel, or at least may be influenced by it hereafter; then put feathers in their caps, and distinguish them from others, talk of public-spiritedness, the love of their country, facing an enemy with intrepidity, despising death, the bed of honor, and such like high-sounding words, and every proud man will take up arms and fight himself to death before he will turn tail, if it be by daylight."

That a theory such as this can be derived from Mandeville's pages is undoubted. On the other hand he sometimes gives a quite different impression. He usually is credited

with the belief that man is no more than a theater of the passions, and that virtue consists accordingly in actions which, while they simulate a noble disinterestedness, and a zeal for religion and the public service, are in reality only a hidden indulgence of one passion at the expense of another. We are courageous because we get angry and forget our fears, honorable because we do not dare to face public condemnation, industrious from necessity or avarice, public-spirited because it is in this way that our vanity can most easily be fed. But along with these there are other not infrequent utterances of a different sort. Strictly he does not say that the overcoming of one passion by another is all there is to virtue. It is not virtue, but only its counterfeit. And the real virtue which it counterfeits is precisely the conquest of our passions by reason and true religion at the cost of genuine effort and self-denial.[1]

2. There are two hypotheses on which the apparent discrepancy here might be explained. It is always possible that Mandeville in these latter statements is not honest, but is pretending to believe things which he does not actually believe. This seems, however, to be a gratuitous suspicion. On the whole there is nothing in the impression of Mandeville's character which his writings give to justify attributing to him a lack of intellectual straightforwardness; and no one with his peculiar record can plausibly be charged with a disposition to trim his words for the sake of escaping public censure. At any rate there is an alternative explanation. Mandeville may be taken as a moral realist who is not so much engaged in setting forth a theory of virtue as he is in exposing the pretensions to virtue in the human animal. It is possible, that is, to regard him—and in this way we are probably most likely to be doing justice to his merits—as animated in the first instance not by a scientific interest, but

[1] *Cf.* Vol I, pp. 230, 239, 260, 405; Vol II, pp. 15, 56, 77, 101, 102, 106, 109, 118, 127, 336, 340, 345. (References are to the recent edition by F. B. Kaye, Oxford, 1924.)

by an antipathy to that compound of muddle-headedness and hypocrisy which sacrifices honest thinking and speaking to the sanctity of moralistic formulas.

Thus the eulogists of morality had credited to it frugality and thrift as the foundation of a sound national life. Mandeville quite properly points out that people seldom put up with plain living apart from need or avarice, or from a natural deficiency of energy and ambition; and the sincerity of those who profess a scorn for luxury and display can be sufficiently tested by noticing how many of them persist in their frugal habits when they happen to have come into a fortune. So when we see a man preaching in the pulpit the vanity of all earthly enjoyments, and in practice plainly liking good food and drink, and eagerly accepting any invitation to dine at the tables of the wealthy, is it his acts or his professions that we should believe? Mandeville refuses to be impressed by the assumption that when a man uses a little common sense in appraising human claims to virtue he is showing himself a cynic and an enemy to morality; and he is constantly engaged in pointing out the absurdity of these claims. The clergyman—Mandeville finds a rich source of material in the cloth—tries hard to get a better living, or adds to his present burdens by taking on several livings at once, merely that he may have a larger field for usefulness. The physician aims to increase an already extensive practice solely to relieve human suffering. The only reason why the politician wants high office is to save his country. And presumably the poor widow scrimps and saves to apprentice her son to a chimney sweep because she knows how, for want of clean chimneys, the broth has often been spoiled and the house set on fire, and therefore for the good of her generation she is ready to make sacrifices to assist in preventing the mischiefs due to soot. In the choice of the Pope the greatest dependence of the cardinals, and what they principally rely upon, is the influence of the Holy Ghost. And what a beautiful prospect of natural affection to

our kind is presented by the shopkeeper, who provides employment for the deserving poor, entertains strangers with studied civility, and waits their leisure all day long in an open shop where he bears the summer's heat and the winter's cold with equal cheerfulness.

For interpreting Mandeville's excursions into ethical philosophy we may, then, with a good deal of plausibility, take as a point of departure the obvious irritation which he feels toward the common habit of giving eulogistic names and explanations to conduct that can evidently be accounted for more simply. Having a fondness for plain fact, and a flair for the absurd in human actions, it was inevitable that he should find the current ethical theories fair game. Apart from Hobbes, they were all employed in crying up the nobilities of human nature. Whether with Cumberland we emphasize universal benevolence, or with Clarke the eternal relations in the universe, or with Shaftesbury the beauty of the moral order and the supremacy of good taste, it is invariably some form of reason that governs the conduct of all worthy and respectable citizens. To Mandeville, looking about with an unbiased eye upon his neighbors and the general drift of human affairs, the notion that man is an amiable being governed by reason, and inspired by an ardent affection for his fellow man, seems not unnaturally to have its humorous side. A philosopher may very well be impressed, however, by the undesirableness of a habit of attributing to benevolence or a sense of duty actions that plainly have no such origin, without going on to say that the standards of virtue possess no reality at all in so far as they stand opposed to common practice.

And Mandeville not only states plainly that he does not repudiate a higher standard, but, up to a point, such a criterion is implied alike in his opinions and his method. He seldom or never gives the impression, common with those who have really been concerned to establish ethics on a purely naturalistic basis, that he is congratulating himself

on freeing mankind from moralistic scruples and superstitions. On the contrary, his satire is continually being trained against the "vices" to which he is sometimes supposed to have reduced all virtue; and it is difficult to see why he should continue to view these with a mixture of obvious amusement and contempt if his real purpose was to justify them against current and mistaken notions of what virtue is. The example most frequently occurring in Mandeville's pages is that of honor, by which he means not genuine self-respect, but those artificial rules of good society which easily reveal themselves under scrutiny as the offspring of pride and of a regard for the opinion of the world, and which may bring the man of honor at any moment into sharp conflict with the precepts of religion. And it hardly needs Mandeville's own assertion that his "defense" of dueling in this connection is satirically intended, to make plain the conspicuous lack of admiration for such counterfeit or worldly honor which his whole treatment presupposes. What he is really interested in pointing out is, once again, not the illusoriness of true honor and religion, but the absurdity of supposing that a man can pursue one of two contradictory ideals without giving up the other—can combine Christian humility with the education of a gentleman.[2]

Mandeville's "theory," then, can most easily be interpreted as a protest against the habit of transforming acts that in reality grow out of a natural desire to gratify a man's own passions, and that cost him nothing, into meritorious deeds of virtue. It is with this in view, primarily, that he delights in pointing out how motives of self-interest can be found everywhere mixed up with human conduct. And so when he talks, for example, of the "felicity which the man who is conscious of having performed a noble action enjoys in self-love, whilst he is thinking on the applause he expects of others," such a statement may mean, and

[2] II, 17.

appears to mean, not that the pleasure which attends it is the only possible motive of a virtuous deed, but that *in so far as* an act gives pleasure to the agent it belongs to natural history rather than to morality, and we are not called upon to grow excited over its superlative merit. Mandeville's real opinion comes out with special clearness in connection with his attack upon one current theory in particular. This is the notion, fathered by Shaftesbury, that virtue is an easy and natural product, to be attained by giving rein to our more kindly impulses.[3] Against this Mandeville sets the counter-claim that virtue is not natural but acquired, the outcome of a struggle with imperious passions. Shaftesbury's view seems to him to be the fertile source of self-deception; its tendency is to lead a man to find specious reasons for following his own bent, just as Shaftesbury himself allowed his natural aversion to mixing in the world's business, and the value he set on tranquillity of mind, to persuade him that he was virtuous when he was only indolent and inoffensive. And if now this antipathy to Shaftesbury is honest—which it clearly is—it follows, also, that Mandeville must be sincere when he calls on us to admire a rational conquest of the passions as the true ideal of virtue.

3. But it is time to turn back again to Mandeville's original thesis, since this complicates to some extent what has just been said about his ethics. The economic claim that private vices are public benefits is, to be sure, not as paradoxical as it sounds. By vice, as he explains at length, he means to cover everything that men think of as an evil —not moral defects only, but such things as pestilences, the niggardliness of nature, and all the natural drawbacks that render people discontented with their lot and rouse them to exertion. In other words, a substantial part of Mandeville's doctrine comes to this, that it needs the threat of evil to overcome human inertia, and furnish motivation for

[3] I, 331-2; II, 109.

those achievements that separate civilization from the state of nature. It is not the good and kindly qualities of man that make him beyond other animals a sociable creature, but the requirements of that self-interest which the moralists decry. Society depends on the multiplicity of desires, and on the difficulties found in meeting them; and the social virtues, therefore, are not given at the start in the form of a natural love of the species, but are brought about gradually through experience and discipline.[4]

A second qualification is equally harmless when it is put in terms that do not aim to startle the reader. One appreciable part of the claim that civilization rests on vices is at bottom no more than this, that human passions and desires are the stuff out of which conduct is made, so that if we regard the natural impulses as inherently vile, and disinterested reason as the only worthy trait of human nature—and this is what those whom Mandeville was criticizing were apt to do—then we shall have to say that vice is the source of prosperity and progress. Such a statement would lose most of its terrors if it were supposed, instead, that the raw material of conduct is neither good nor bad, but neutral, and that it only lends itself to moralistic judgment in terms of its outcome. Thus the "virtues" of parental love or of compassion are really not virtuous as such, since at times they clash with the welfare of the larger whole; while, on the other hand, ambition or the love of gain, commonly frowned on by the moralists, may lead a man to do things by which everybody benefits. On this showing, the defense of vice would be a defense of the natural impulses, or springs of action, against the human self-esteem which endeavors to forget that man is also an animal, and that the loftiest feelings have their source in his physical constitution.

Both of these considerations, it will be noticed, go back in the end to the same philosophic root. On the side of historical genesis, in which he everywhere shows a lively

[4] I, 369, 402*sq.*; II, 184.

interest, Mandeville is quite definitely an evolutionist, with a good grasp of the rough-and-ready methods of naturalistic development. His merits here will be apparent if we compare his treatment either with the idyllic conceptions of primitive man which more orthodox thinkers held, or with the Hobbian doctrine of a hard-and-fast contrast between human passions as the source of evil and reason as the sole cause of social good. Mandeville's speculations on the cultural history of society and man are, on the whole, much superior to anything current in his day in England, and in some respects come as close to the probabilities as anyone is likely to get who has only a shrewd knowledge of human nature to go upon, without an actual acquaintance with the facts of primitive life.

In so far, the connection with a theory of ethics is not of necessity a very close one. A genetic account of manners and institutions does not have to commit itself at all to judgments about their value; while it furnishes material for these, it moves, as science, in a different field. But this separation of problems becomes a little difficult to keep up consistently when we turn to a further aspect of Mandeville's thesis, which is, on the whole, its most striking one. For among the points he relies upon to prove his case, and prominent among them, are also to be found qualities such as everyone would agree are really vices—the traits against which he himself is constantly employing the weapons of his satire. It is highly probable that his economic theory here is twisted, and that some of the evils to which he points are a natural by-product of civilized society rather than among its necessary sources. Certainly he goes to no trouble to inquire whether they might not conceivably be eliminated to a large extent without altering the social structure fundamentally; the judgment that the commercial prosperity of London is inseparable from its dirty streets is typical of his attitude everywhere. But it does not make much difference for the present purpose whether his eco-

nomic doctrine is true, so long as he himself believes it; if he believes it to be true, the fact that the prosperity of society depends for him on the presence of such morally unpleasant qualities cannot but constitute a problem.

His own answer to the criticisms urged against him is in a general way in line with what has previously been said. He does not, so he tells us, mean that vices are necessary to society. They are only necessary to the sort of society with which his readers are familiar, and which aims at wealth and power and expansion; and this implies no approval or justification of such aims.[5] So that it might be just possible to hold that in his economic speculations, also, he is speaking simply as a satirist, concerned not to defend his paradox in earnest, but to ridicule, in the interest of a severer type of goodness, the logical and moral inconsistency of the man who tries to combine a pretense to such genuine virtue with the aims and customs that inevitably lead away from it, and who thinks he can be a true Christian without giving up the world.

But such an interpretation would be too forced to carry conviction. Without much doubt, Mandeville takes his economics seriously. Perhaps what he has to say about charity schools offers as good an illustration as any of his double interest. On the one hand this entertaining and not uninstructive little essay is an excellent specimen of his satirical gifts, brought to bear on the psychology of popular charity. Nevertheless it is not here that Mandeville's main interest lies; the primary ground for his dislike of "this enthusiastic passion for Charity Schools under which the nation has labored" is the economic one. He does not believe in educating the poor, because it is simply giving them a smattering of knowledge which raises them above their station without really benefiting them, and at the expense of their superiors, or, as Mandeville would put it, of society. There seems no reason to suspect that Mande-

[5] I, 229; II, 106.

ville in this is not expressing a perfectly sincere opinion; one cannot read, for example, his account of the way in which servants have been spoiled in his own day, how they are demanding privileges and wages out of all reason, and have even had the insolence to form a union to enforce their interests against those of their employers, without the conviction that he is genuinely voicing the righteous indignation of the honest householder. And the consequence is an apparent inconsistency in his attitude. At times we find him giving expression to a satirical dislike for the qualities most in evidence in the polite world, and for the social system that needs them for its basis. And then again he seems to take civilized society for granted, and man's deficiencies as excused, if not justified, by the part they play in making society possible.

4. No explanation of this inconsistency will get very far which does not recognize the real problem that underlies it. The same conflict confronts the present-day thinker. The modernity of Mandeville lies in the fact that he sets out to treat man in a naturalistic and genetic way; and for anyone who adopts this standpoint it is inevitable that he should find himself justifying—in an historical sense—many things which the natural moral judgment does not look upon with favor. As he surveys the course of history he everywhere is met by unlovely traits of human nature which yet seem to have played a necessary part in placing man where he stands to-day, and which even now continue—in business, for example, or in international relations—glossed over or defended on the plea of their necessity. And if Mandeville fails to hit upon an entirely satisfying reconciliation of the difficulty, the same thing is true of most other people also.

Now and then, to be sure, a scientist follows the lead of his logic, and really proposes to justify private vices; secure in the confidence that the business of science is merely to accept whatever it may find, he takes Nature's ways as

sufficiently vindicated by the fact of their existence, and refuses to condemn where Nature seems to tolerate. But comparatively few thinkers have the strength of mind for such a stand; most of them, and Mandeville is among the number, reserve the right, where human living is concerned, to approve or disapprove of Nature's methods according to standards of their own.

A more common attitude is one which seeks to outflank the problem by the use of evasive formulas. It is of some interest to note the way in which this lessens the gap between Mandeville and his opponents. As a matter of fact, the thing for which Mandeville was execrated was much the same thing in essence that many of his critics had themselves more or less unctuously been preaching. When the philosopher and the theologian claim that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and that apparent evils really are not evil, since in the end they work for good, they mean practically what they were blaming Mandeville for saying; the chief difference is that Mandeville calls a spade a spade, whereas the theologians cover up the implications of their doctrine by fixing atttention solely on the justifying end, and utilize the language of religion to keep themselves respectable.

Meanwhile the great majority of people adopt neither of these courses, but are content to hold both opinions together, forgetting one conveniently when occupied with the other. As spectators they look with equanimity upon many things which they would not think of approving in themselves or of recommending to their neighbors. In dealing with the past, and especially with the remoter past, this seems a natural and easy thing to do; it is not quite so simple in the case of judgments on contemporary conduct. And therefore an ardent soul will occasionally be found trying to square social practice with moral insight by repudiating the standards of existing civilization, and setting up a new ideal of society in its place. But mostly we accept the world as

we find it, and while regarding with a tepid approval visions of a better social order, postpone their realization indefinitely to some period when possibly human nature shall have altered.

As a consequence, however, we are left with two standards which seldom harmonize completely; we approve, honestly enough, the rarer virtue of a kindly, unselfish, and self-respecting goodness, and use it as our ideal criterion of the good man, while at the same time in our practical judgments, on ourselves as well as on others, we are inclined to be more realistic and not to ask too much of human nature. War, doubtless, is an evil; but so long as war is with us we hesitate to speak too harshly of the passion for military glory or the susceptibility to mob hysteria, however absurd and paltry they may seem to the eye of reason. Or we find excuses for the selfish greed and the capacity for driving a hard bargain which lead to success in competitive business, though we are perfectly aware that these qualities are in themselves neither attractive nor inspiring. To make entirely harmonious the two standpoints is, as has just been said, difficult if not impossible. But ordinarily we do not feel the discrepancy very acutely; there seems to us no special reason why we should not look with a tolerant eye on everyday conduct as about as good as we have any right to expect, while freely admitting that it is not the best.

And Mandeville we may most plausibly suppose is only following here the usual path. He professes a personal liking for the virtues of a simple and uncomplicated existence. But he obviously never thinks of this as a real possibility; and there is no force of reforming zeal within his breast to lead him to fight for a lost cause. He admires the moral strength of the man who can give up wealth and ease voluntarily because he feels their inferiority to virtue. But he has no expectation of finding such characters abundant; and if pride and fear are able to bring about some of the consequences of virtue useful to society, he is prepared to

accept them without a very violent protest. It will do us no harm, at least, to recognize that true virtue consists in subduing the passions by reason rather than in following the path of least resistance, and to hold this before us, not too vocally, as a standard. But there also is no point in refusing to recognize that at best human powers of resistance are weak, the progress we can hope reasonably to make in real virtue correspondingly small, and the task of breaking with the world and all one's pleasant habits too difficult for any but the most heroic natures, among whom Mandeville is free to confess that he himself does not belong.[6]

5. But it is unfair to leave him here without returning once more to our starting-point. Mandeville cannot with the best of will be turned into a reformer; he is too easy-going and too coolly disinterested to think seriously of trying to change the world, which is after all not a bad world for a gentleman of independent means, an active mind, and a gift for enjoying the foibles of his neighbors. But if he is not called upon to make the world better, at least he insists on not being fooled by sham virtues. He proposes to see things as they are and to call them by their right names; however bad the human situation, there is no need to add the vice of hypocrisy and the folly of self-delusion. If he has any ethical purpose in writing it pretty clearly lies here. "What hurt do I do a man," he asks, "if I make him more known to himself than he was before?" [7] At least this will render him a little more tolerant in his judgments on his neighbors; and it is only when he realizes his weaknesses that he is likely to set about improvement.

Even this may be made a subject of debate. Mandeville's critics—and they have a wide following—blame him for taking a "low" view of human nature. It is much better, they hold, to idealize things a little, since otherwise you will discourage men's better impulses, and make them satisfied with an unworthy plane of conduct. We should, as Mande-

[6] *Cf.* II, 19.

[7] I, 230.

ville remarks, put the best construction on all that others do or say that things are capable of. If a man builds a fine house, though he has not one symptom of humility, furnishes it richly, and lays out a good estate in plate and pictures, we should not think that he does it out of vanity, but to encourage artists, employ hands, and set the poor to work for the good of his country; and if a man sleeps at church, so he does not snore, we should think he shuts his eyes to increase his attention.[8] That there is a good deal to be said for Mandeville's own procedure is, however, plain. It is an open question whether, even for philosophy, the too exclusive preoccupation with ideals has not been one reason for the relative sterility of ethical speculation; and most certainly in practice it has led men to take formulas for authoritative facts, and conventions for desirable ideals, in a way that has discouraged the self-knowledge that alone supplies a sound basis for conduct.

It may be useful to gather up the threads of this discussion. The difficulty of getting Mandeville's point is chiefly due to the fact that he has two relatively separate interests —the interest of moral satire and that of genetic explanation—which he insists on intertwining. Having committed himself in his original skit to a paradox which in its very statement had implied a moral valuation, he consistently refused to alter it. As a matter of fact he had himself, as a social historian, no real objection to man as a natural being; and he might have carried through his genetic speculations, as indeed he does in places, strictly on their own merits. But here he found himself continually at odds with his contemporaries, whose philosophy did involve a condemnation of the natural, and, in consequence, a vicious idealization of man's whole moral life. And in his zeal to combat this, Mandeville was carried farther into the ethical problem than he had at first intended, and never quite succeeded in disentangling the genuine form of the problem from the

[8] I, 254.

complications he had let himself in for by his desire to shock the public. Very probably if he had avoided this confusion he would not have made the enormous hit he did; but he would have saved much trouble for his commentators.

CHAPTER XII

THE ETHICS OF CONSCIENCE

Butler · Reid · Price · Martineau

1. In spite of the entire respectability of some of its defenders, the theory of a moral sense has never quite escaped, for Englishmen, a taint of heterodoxy. A suspicion has remained that it undermines the universality and authority of the moral judgment, which explanations have failed to remove. The more conservative English mind, accordingly, has on the whole shown a preference for some form of rational intuition. At the same time the moral sense doctrine has not been without effect in shifting the emphasis within the rationalistic or intuitionalist schools. "Conscience," which since Bishop Butler has shown a tendency to displace "reason" in their terminology, is for its more enlightened advocates a form of reason; but under the influence of the moral sense conception it becomes a special form, or "faculty." And on the whole the change perhaps is an improvement. At least the term "conscience" calls attention to the fact that moral reason has a peculiar subject matter which sets it apart from other rational pronouncements; and until this is clearly recognized no advance in analysis is possible.

The thing, however, which more especially this change in terminology serves to emphasize is an aspect which heretofore had been taken too much for granted. Both reason and the moral sense are forms of what popularly is known as conscience; but for both alike the peculiar differentia of the latter term is secondary and derivative. Conscience involves rational perception, and it involves emotional or

qualitative preference; but it stands primarily for *authority*. Reason and sentiment always have been assumed to carry such authority; but it had been for the most part an assumption and an afterthought. The later schools of intuitionalism now bring this fundamental character of the moralistic experience into the foreground. Conscience still retains the traits both of belief and feeling. But also, and primarily, it gives expression to the notion of a moral imperative, which neither of the other terms quite adequately suggests.

Bishop Butler is perhaps the most typically English of all the English ethicists; he comes closest, that is, to what the average moral but nevertheless intelligent Englishman would recognize as expressing in theory the actual way his moral experience looks to him. The possessor of a vigorous and solid intellect and a large fund of common sense, Butler continued in consequence, down to recent times, very generally to be accepted as the master of ethical speculation by the more reputable section of British opinion. It may be questioned whether he has really added anything new to the analysis of the ethical situation. But he did do a different sort of thing, valuable in its way: he brought a strong sense of empirical reality to the evaluation of preceding contributions with their rather bewildering variety of motives, and so restored something of the balance and sobriety that belonged to the earlier Greek tradition.

In the large, Butler's purpose might be described as an effort to recast the classical Greek conception of the moral life in a way to do justice to the Christian emphasis on conscience and the sense of duty. For one thing, he goes back to the classical psychology. We do not aim at pleasure, but at *objects*.[1] What we need to take our start from is the conception of man as a being with a given constitution made up of active impulses that call for satisfaction in more or less determinate ways; pleasure accompanies the exercise

[1] *Sermons*, XI, 6.

of these faculties, but is in no wise responsible for them in the first place.

And such being the case, there is no *a priori* reason why we should expect the objects that gratify an impulse or desire to be confined within the arbitrary limits of the self and its private ends or feelings; what objects we shall desire is to be determined solely by the evidence of experience. And the fact plainly is that other people may be interesting to us on their own account, and that their welfare may be made an object of immediate desire without its having first to be translated into ideas of self-gratification; just as we desire food because we are hungry and not because we aim at pleasant feeling directly.[2] Furthermore those who would have it that "self-love" is the universal motive are in still another way misinterpreting the real situation. For self-love needs to be carefully distinguished from the natural propensities that furnish the raw material of desire.[3] Every satisfaction of desire does gratify the self. But to constitute self-love there has to be added to the idea of the particular objects which excite desire a further idea—the idea of the self as regulating the expression of desire; and this is a product of *reflection*. Out of the self-regarding impulses, therefore, there may arise a new motive, belonging to man as a reasonable creature reflecting on his own interests, in the shape of a desire to gratify the self as a whole instead of this or that instinct in particular. And in precisely the same way, instead of acting out of love of offspring, or gratitude, or friendly feeling, desires of this latter sort, implanted by nature in the interest of others rather than of our private selves, may by the addition of a sense of reflective approval turn into the rational motive of benevolence.

Accordingly no reason whatever has appeared why self-love and benevolence may not really be motives as distinct and independent as to experience they seem to be. The

[2] I, 7.

[3] Preface, 35.

paradox of a "disinterested" motive is no real paradox. Every motive must be interested in the sense that it would not constitute a motive were it not connected with some human satisfaction; but to say that it therefore must be "selfish" is to disregard the natural use of language. On the other hand *all* the original instincts are equally disinterested if we mean by this that they do not have the self and its happiness consciously in view. It is better to confine the term "interested" to this latter field. And accordingly it once more follows that happiness is not dependent on self-love. It consists in the enjoyment of those objects which are by nature suited to our several particular appetites, passions, and affections; so that if self-love were wholly to engross us to the exclusion of every other principle, the sources of happiness would in reality be dried up.[4]

2. It is with a second aspect of the Greek conception, however, that the most characteristic side of Butler's ethics comes into view. This has to do with the idea of subordination and organic unity in man's nature.[5] The principle of such a subordination had for the Greeks been found in Reason. "Conscience" is reason, or reflection, translated into moralistic and semi-theological terms; it is reason with its law-making and duty-setting powers brought into sharper relief. In general it performs the Platonic service of assigning the various elements of human nature to their proper place in that system of the good life which represents man's true end; it is an additional principle, distinguishable alike from the primary instincts and affections, and from the secondary motives of benevolence and self-love, which as a monitor within the breast stands above all other human faculties, and, by approving or condemning them, passes on their relative rank and value.[6]

Butler's doctrine of conscience serves, it may be allowed, a useful purpose in calling renewed attention to the need

[4] Preface, 39; I, 5*sq.*; V, 1; XI. [5] Preface, 24.
[6] II, 8; *Dissertation upon the Nature of Virtue,* 1.

for a principled ground of subordination among the ingredients of human nature which a naturalistic analysis reveals. But while it satisfies this need in a formal way, it is a conception too much governed by theological prepossessions not to be open to suspicion; and in any case it still has some way to go before it can satisfy the demands of theory. Just how conscience acts, whence it derives its authority, and what precisely its relation is to the further principles of self-love and benevolence, are all questions that Butler leaves indeterminate. Certainly it does not, like utilitarian reason, accomplish its end by demonstrating the claims of virtue as a means to happiness, though such a large coincidence between the two, Butler holds, does in reality exist. It is one of his chief purposes to show that the historical opposition between virtue and happiness, or between self-love and benevolence, is unfounded; we have on the one hand moral duties toward ourselves and our own interests, while on the other social claims upon us, instead of subtracting from our private happiness, are among its most fruitful sources.[7] But it is not the peculiar business of conscience to point out this relationship. Conscience deals in imperatives, and not in arguments; the judgment it pronounces rests on an intrinsic right on the part of the highest faculty of man's nature to take command.

As a matter of fact the work of prudential reason is turned over to another principle—self-love. But here Butler's theory gives rise to further questions. For the authority of self-love over the separate impulses is not the simple matter it at first might seem to be. It is not merely the case that, as a fact of natural history, the indulgence of an isolated impulse is likely to clash with the demands of a rational self-interest; this latter interest *ought* to be preferred by us, and a particular indulgence *ought* not to be permitted to jeopardize the self's more comprehensive good.[8] But if self-love is not simply a rational mode of

[7] *Sermons* III, XI.

[8] *Sermons,* II, 11; *Dissertation,* 6.

satisfying more completely our desires, but a norm as well, and if we say that prudence also is a duty, the principle no longer appears as independent, but, in its inner and rational essence, as a particular form of conscience itself.

It is understandable that as a theologian and preacher Butler should have thought it wiser to stop with the felt authority of conscience, and not to raise further issues. Meanwhile in any case we are pointed to a new element in the situation which lies outside the Greek view of reason, whether in its utilitarian or its speculative aspect. As against the former conscience acts directly by immediate intuition, and not through the intellectual perception of a relation between means and ends. While Butler presupposes an organic human nature which determines what virtue is, and which conscience serves, the only way he suggests of settling the proper subordination of its parts is the bare pronouncement of which conscience is delivered. In a way his usage thus might seem to come closer to Plato's view of reason, with its inherent right to govern, "a disapprobation of reflection being in itself a principle manifestly superior to a mere propension." [9] It is reason, however, not as itself supplying the content of the good life, as in Plato's case, but as an arbiter given it from without—an arbiter whose superiority seems due less to its own intrinsic character than to the place it holds as the voice of man's Creator.

3. The same general point of view gets another widely popular expression in the movement which in particular has preëmpted the name of Intuitionalism, and which takes its rise from Thomas Reid. The philosophy of Reid was a reaction against the subtleties of the metaphysicians from Locke to Hume; as against these, it aimed to get back closer to the actual beliefs of the common man. The task is one not likely to be appreciated highly by other philosophic schools; and it is open to obvious dangers. Still it is something that periodically needs doing if philosophy is

[9] *Sermons, Preface,* 24; II, 13.

not, under the spell of an abstract logic, to get so far away from common thought as to lose alike its interest and its value.

In the very modesty of such a program is to be found the most of what significance it has. If, as Reid urges, it is true that theory ought to follow practical moral rules, and to respect their authority rather than attempt itself to legislate for the moral life, it is worth going to some trouble to find out just what characteristics of the moral judgment do represent the actual facts of ethical opinion. As an attempt at explanation, the philosophy which multiplies original truths wherever it can find distinctions, and provides each with a ready-made "faculty" for its apprehension, is clearly unsatisfactory; it leaves before the mind a mass of facts without inner organization, miraculously combined in a mythical "substance" called a self. But while it has no importance for explanation, the faculty point of view is not without a methodological and descriptive value. The danger that attaches to organizing principles is the temptation they carry to transform the facts in order to bring them under some favorite point of view, and to minimize the importance of such further facts as do not lend themselves readily to this subsumption. The faculty philosopher is comparatively free from this particular temptation; and his testimony as to what the crude facts are is usually, therefore, to be listened to with respect.

Reid's realism leads him, among other things, to some reëmphasis of an aspect of human conduct to which on the whole the English psychological tradition had been singularly blind, and was to continue blind during the subsequent sway of the Utilitarians. This is the *active* tendency in man, as distinct alike from feeling and from reason; "man as well as the dog is made for hunting, and cannot be happy but in some vigorous pursuit." Reid is not very clear about the nature of instinct, or the full significance of its implications; in particular he draws no sharp line between tenden-

cies to action and tendencies to intellectual belief. Still even in this latter sense the notion of faculties at least keeps us from forgetting that man is not, as the associationists generally held, an indeterminate background for the passive reception of impressions, but that he comes into the world with a more or less specific make-up which renders some things easier and more natural than others.

In defense of his own doctrine of conscience as a "rational" faculty of irreducible intuition—a faculty of perceiving directly the right and wrong of actions—Reid is justified in urging, against earlier rationalists, that the judgment of right and wrong is a distinctive one, which can be identified neither with the more general rational structure of the universe on the one hand, nor with the special claims of benevolence or of enlightened self-interest on the other. Likewise against the feeling philosophers he rightly insists that it really is a *judgment,* and is not reducible to mere taste or feeling;[10] though it may be a question whether this last position was ever held, unless inadvertently, by his opponents.

The danger of course is—and some of Reid's followers, at any rate, did not escape it—that the acceptance of right and wrong as ultimate facts of intuition is liable to lead in practice, as the Utilitarians pointed out, to an uncritical satisfaction with any deliverance of the moral conscience as above dispute, which usually will mean standing up for customary standards against attempts to amend them. This is not a necessary consequence, however. A critical and judicial attitude toward the dicta of the moral judgment is no more impossible than in the similar case of the intellectual judgment, where philosophers have generally conceded that "self-evidence" in beliefs is not excluded by the need we are under of distinguishing true from false claimants. "Duty" is, indeed, an idea too simple and ultimate for analysis or definition; but "conscience" is a faculty that develops

[10] *Essays on the Active Powers of Man,* Essay II, Ch. ii.

with experience. Conscience tells us, for example, that we ought to regard the good of others, but it does not tell us directly that we ought to have but one wife; this last obligation is determined by utility. The sort of ultimate judgment Reid finds self-evident, and from which more specific duties may be reached by moral reasoning, is represented by propositions very much the same as those in which the earlier rationalists put their faith: for example, that we should prefer a greater good, though more distant, to a lesser; that we should not do to another what we should think wrong if done to ourselves; that we should comply with the intention of nature as shown by the human constitution; that we should venerate and submit to God.[11] The general lack of rigor in Reid's thinking is indicated by the fact that in his treatment of the first principle just mentioned, he leaves us in considerable doubt whether it is the outcome of conscience or of a rational faculty distinct from conscience.[12]

4. The substantial identity of the faculty philosophy with the older rationalism is made evident by a comparison of Reid with his contemporary Richard Price. Price prefers still to talk of reason rather than of conscience; but in essentials there is little to distinguish his conclusions from those of Reid. Here also the objective character of morality is insisted on, in opposition to those who have recourse alike to the will of God, to social consequences, and to feeling or a moral sense; the moral perception is a judgment of reason, in the special form in which reason reveals to us an objective quality of rightness or wrongness in the action. The natural instincts and impulsions back this judgment, and add to the motives for well-doing. But the moral reason is itself a motive also, and the bare perception of right and wrong carries with it an active obligation—a consequence which, since duty and

[11] Essay III, Pt. III, Ch. viii; Essay III, Pt. III, Ch. vi; Essay V, Ch. i.
[12] *Cf.* Essay III, Pt. III, Ch. ii.

right are synonyms, Price is able to prove very comfortably from a verbal analysis of concepts.[13] Ideally our sense of duty ought to be our *only* motive; and Price accepts the logical corollary that the moral worth of an act is lessened in proportion as there is present a natural impulse to perform it.[14] The purpose of moral education, therefore, is to strengthen the rational will in its purity, so that it may become automatic and assured, while at the same time we are freed progressively from the sway of the natural instincts. These last God has implanted in us as a staff to the reason in its immaturity, and their assistance is to be discarded in proportion as reason becomes able to stand alone.[15]

5. One other and more recent representative of an ethics of conscience dominated by theological prepossessions is also in some ways its most competent and effective one. With his eloquence and wide scholarship, his sympathy with religious liberalism, and his gift for interpreting the subtler religious experiences in terms of their moral significance, James Martineau would in any case deserve consideration; and along with this he brings to the technical work of analysis, as well, a considerable amount of freshness and originality. Two things in particular stand out in Martineau's treatment, both connected with the central fact of conscience; they have to do with the psychological nature of conscience on the one hand, and with the grounds of its validity on the other. As a major premise standing in opposition to all empirical and naturalistic philosophies, morality represents, for him, an objective fact wholly independent of our personal feelings or even of our human constitution. The implications of a sense of duty can be satisfied only in terms of a transcendent Cause which imposes from above its law on human nature, and which as the object of moral

[13] *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals,* pp. 170, 179 (3d ed., London, 1787).

[14] Pp. 323, 330.

[15] Pp. 122, 391.

reverence can be nothing short of a supreme personality, the lord and master of the universe.[16] In fact it is to the claims of conscience that Martineau looks for the chief and decisive proof of the existence of a personal God.

It is perhaps unnecessary to dwell upon this theological theory of the authority of conscience as involving a "communicated preference from a superior mind." It is not irrelevant to note, however, the risk involved in urging that ethical validity will disappear unless we accept one particular metaphysical account of reality, especially when the modern world has shown some disposition to turn away from this. Martineau argues that we have a natural tendency to assume a righteous personal source of moral distinctions in just the same way that we tend to postulate the existence of physical objects over against the perceiving self; and while neither belief can be proved, both are equally justified by the fact that they are immediate depositions of our faculties without which the rational life could not proceed. But this is precisely the difference in the two cases. If we did not act *as if* objects of sense existed, we could not continue to exist at all; whereas it is quite possible to live the moral life without interpreting value or worth in supernatural terms.

A second and more technical feature is, however, what lends to Martineau's ethical philosophy its chief interest.[17] The moral judgment, he maintains, arises only as there comes about a conflict of impulses in the inner life of a unitary self. Under such circumstances a new experience may be born; there may emerge a recognition that the two competing impulses differ not only in force or intensity of desire, but in *quality*—that one of them is superior in worth or dignity to the other. Now this is what constitutes the essence of the moral judgment—the perception of a com-

[16] *Cf. Types of Ethical Theory,* Vol II. pp. 4-5, 104*sq.* (3d ed., Oxford, 1891).

[17] II, 282*sq.*, 433*sq.*

parative difference of value between any two of the original springs of human action which their rivalry in consciousness may lead us to compare. An act is right when, confronted with a lower motive, we choose to follow a higher; thus the act attributed to Regulus in turning back to death at Carthage was right because the reverence for veracity whence it sprung is a higher principle than any fear or personal affection that might have suggested a different course. Consequently moral value is always relative in a sense; the quality of a given motive will differ according as it is this or that rival motive with which it is contrasted.[18] Benevolence is a higher motive than the love of money, and ought therefore to be followed in preference to greed; but it is felt to be inferior to reverence and becomes immoral when it means setting reverence aside. It is this that explains how an act which one man's conscience holds is right to another will seem wrong; the two men are, without realizing it, measuring by different standards.

Conscience, then, is not the perception of a universal norm which subjects all conduct to a single principle; it works only when a pair of concrete impulses—*any* two impulses really native to the human constitution—present themselves for a comparative valuation. In the first instance each pronouncement which it makes is immediate, individual, and independent of conscious reflection. After a sufficient number of such ethical judgments have occurred, however, it is possible for the reflective consciousness to gather up the results of these various approvals, arranging the impulses in a graduated scale of excellence in accordance with the verdicts it finds strewn throughout experience; and here the chief business of an ethical science will lie.

There are features of this ethical analysis which deserve a sympathetic hearing. It does seem to be the fact that the ethical judgment is concerned with degrees of value which present themselves to reflection rather than in action, and

[18] II, 271.

which depend, moreover, on the special nature of the situation with its alternative possibilities, and not on the reduction of all value to a connection with some absolute ideal or *summum bonum*. Both for theory and practice, accordingly, the method by which these comparative values in the concrete are determined would seem to be worthy of more attention than the ethicist usually has given it.

But questions may be raised about Martineau's own solution. It rests on a psychology, for one thing, which is much less assured than he assumes; more recent investigations rather cast doubt on the confidence that human nature can be divided up into a well-defined set of original instincts. And the doubt is strengthened by one consideration in particular. Martineau's theory places itself in explicit opposition to the competing claim of the Utilitarians—that our approval depends on the *consequences* of an action; for him it is directed solely to the impulses from which conduct springs. At the same time he allows that consequences are not morally indifferent. Frequently he meets difficulties and objections by conceding that we cannot *fully* determine the nature of our duty, or of what is right in conduct, without adding to the deliverance of conscience about the relative rank of motives another judgment, which takes into account the outcome of our choice.[19] It is true he insists that this is a different kind of judgment; it concerns the object of *prudential* preference and not the moral quality of an act.[20] Nevertheless the need of recognizing two sorts of judgment before we can determine the object of moral approval introduces a complication which Martineau never very satisfactorily straightens out.

In reality it will be found impossible to separate the two, and to estimate the bare impulse or affection without taking into consideration at the same time its results. Certainly it cannot be done without the risk of playing into the hands

[19] *Cf.* II, 195, 196, 198, 218, 232, 235, 244, 254, 264, 272, 281, 290, 300.
[20] II, 70*sq.*

of that subjectivism which it is Martineau's great anxiety to avoid. What is benevolence, for example, if we deduct the desirable consequences that benevolence foresees? There is nothing left but a floating wisp of sentiment, whose preferableness to any other sentiment will have no ground except the force of its personal appeal. How indeed is it conceivable that motives should get objective value at all except in objective terms? Or how can a given pure motive, like benevolence, fail to find its own significance modified by the relative magnitude of the interests bound up with its competitors? The whole attempt to draw a line between native insight and the wisdom arising from experience, with its corollary that in the child rather than in its grandparents the true instinct of conscience is most likely to stand revealed,[21] is of very dubious validity. The more we insist that values are objective, the more comprehensive, it would seem, ought the experience to be made in which a true perception of values resides.

[21] II, 72.

CHAPTER XIII

THEOLOGICAL UTILITARIANISM

LOCKE · PALEY · HARTLEY

1. THE appearance of utilitarianism in its broader sense it would be useless to attempt to date accurately in the history of ethical thought. So obvious a consideration as the influence of the public welfare on what men shall regard as virtuous or vicious might be expected to suggest itself to the earliest speculations about the moral life, and to enter as a motive into the most varied types of theory. In British ethics previous to Locke it had everywhere been prominent; it is only a matter of emphasis whether Cumberland, for example, be described as a utilitarian or a rationalist. Utilitarianism became a real party program only when, with Bentham, it ceased to represent merely an outcome of descriptive analysis, and was adopted as a method of critical attack on existing social institutions. In the subjects of the present chapter utility continues for the most part to be a device for explaining and justifying current virtues. Nevertheless the concept of utility is now so explicitly formulated as to give some ground for selecting this as a starting-point for the utilitarian movement.

It is hardly fair to John Locke to take his ethical philosophy too seriously. He professes to believe, indeed, that ethics is capable not only of a rational but of a demonstrative treatment; [1] and he indicates, rather casually, the lines which this would follow. But the suggestion is subordinated to his interest in proving that there are no such things as innate ideas; and the discussion suffers not only from a

[1] Bk. I, Ch. iii, 1.

lack of thoroughness, but from the narrowness of Locke's interpretation of the doctrine he was opposing—a doctrine which he always thinks of in terms of specific intellectual propositions implanted in the mind, along with all their constituent concepts, without assistance from experience.

Locke's chief suggestions toward a positive theory of conduct are two in number. Of these the theological aspect is the one that stands out most prominently in his general formulas. The authoritative character of morality he traces to the penalties and rewards which a just God visits on human conduct; and it is in this connection that he is able to conceive of ethics as a demonstrative science. For on the one hand the existence of God as creator and lawgiver is, he thinks, capable of being proved by reason; while also it is a self-evident proposition—because in reality a verbal one—that it is our duty to do what God commands, since moral duty has no assignable meaning except in terms of a course of conduct which is ordained by law, and which receives its sanction from rewards and punishments at the hands of the lawmaker.[2]

But while the general framework of ethics is thus a derivative from theism, it is to a second principle that the concrete content of morality is mainly due. For Locke, as a deist, the nature of God's will must in the large be capable of being discovered by the human reason; and the natural direction in which to look for it is in the field of social utility. It is evident to reason that the general good is on the whole promoted by the precepts of morality, and, also, that the interests of society are closely related to that self-interest, or desire for happiness, which for Locke is the original spring of all human action, and the sole source of meaning to the term "good." [3] A reasonable creature sees that he can be protected against thieves only through the imposition of general laws which, along with others, apply to him-

[2] Bk. I, Ch. iii, 12; Bk. II, Ch. xxviii, 5.
[3] Bk. II, Ch. xx, 2.

self as well; and so he becomes willing to have his own thieving propensities restrained by law for the sake of protection against the same propensities in his neighbors, and to "cry up that for sacred which, if once trampled on and profaned, he himself cannot be safe nor secure." [4] And a general agreement to this effect produces, through human agencies, social penalties for the violation of the law, such as are needed to render it effective and so a source of duty.

Here, however, Locke's theology comes in again, and he finds a still more direct and dependable, as well as a more ultimate ground of obedience, in God himself, who as a rational being must desire the happiness of his creatures, and who backs the rules that make for the general welfare, partly through the consequences of vice or virtue perceivable through the workings of physical nature, and partly, we may believe, in a future world. It is this divine law, as distinguished from the civil law and the law of opinion or of reputation, which supplies the true touchstone of moral rectitude, and determines what really *is* virtue as opposed to what men *call* virtue.[5] And the thing that especially clinches the proof of our obligation to be virtuous is the doctrine of a future life, since even the fact that this doctrine may *possibly* be true ought, on the theory of probabilities, to influence a genuinely rational mind. The argument might not hold were the vicious man notably the better off in this present world. But such he is not. Even here and now the wicked have not much the odds to brag of. And "who in his wits would choose to come within a possibility of infinite misery, which if he miss, there is yet nothing to be got by that hazard? Whereas, on the other hand, the sober man ventures nothing against infinite happiness to be got, if his expectation comes not to pass." [6]

The chief social value of Locke's ethical speculations is perhaps to be looked for in their tendency to unsettle the habit of an unquestioning acceptance of moral conventions;

[4] Bk. I, Ch. iii, 6. [5] Bk. II, Ch. xxviii, 8, 10. [6] Bk. II, Ch. xxi, 70.

though his own interest in bringing such a result about was more for the sake of freeing the intellect than of effecting practical moral innovations. The thesis that there is no moral rule whereof man may not justly demand a reason furnishes, indeed, a charter of reform. But as might have been expected from one of Locke's cautious type of mind, in getting rid of the innateness of moral rules he himself takes good care not to disturb their practical authority; no evil consequences, he insists, follow from his doctrine, and the difference in origin leaves our assurance of validity untouched. In fact he is so desirous of maintaining this, that, as has appeared, his method in ethics tends to shift from empiricism to a rationalistic demonstration of moral rules based on the necessary truths of religion.

Where Locke's empirical leanings chiefly assert themselves is in the sober and modest level on which his conception of human happiness moves. There is no single *summum bonum;* to argue whether the best life takes this or that form is to argue whether the best relish be found in apples, grapes, or nuts. Every form of good does not necessarily move every particular man's desire. Nor is a man usually insistent on claiming from destiny all that even he himself might find enjoyable. He is apt to be content with any pleasure that is actually present; and he who is content is happy. This unassuming notion of man's good is connected with Locke's further doctrine that the chief if not the only spur to human industry is not the thought of future pleasures, but the feeling of uneasiness which attends desire, and whose removal constitutes the first and most essential step toward happiness. Consequently it is not the greatest possible good that moves the will, except as our desire may have been raised proportionately to the notion so as to make us uneasy in the want of it; if this were indeed the case, the joys of heaven would be much more effective as a motive than commonly they are.[7]

7 Bk. II, Ch. xxi, 35, 36, 43, 55, 68.

2. The possibility of solving the problems of ethical motivation in theological terms has its best known representative in William Paley. Paley's reputation as an ethicist stands at the present day very low. Chiefly he is known as the author of the famous definition of virtue as "the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness," a point of view particularly obnoxious to the modern age. Notwithstanding this Paley has his merits. There is a fresh and stimulating quality that still lingers about his pages, such as comes only from a real attempt to see things for oneself; and, in particular, there is a certain intellectual honesty not always to be found in philosophers of more repute, for which he has hardly received sufficient credit. Paley may not have had an eye for the finer moral qualities. But at least he seldom pretends to anything he does not really feel himself; and the result is on the whole an absence alike of unctuousness and of finespun reasoning that cannot be pinned down to specific facts of experience.

Nor, so far as mere theory goes, does Paley's theological bias quite justify the assumption of a moral superiority which later Utilitarians were disposed to claim. The real basis of morals is very much the same for Paley as it is for Bentham. For both the sole good of man is happiness, or the greatest attainable sum of pleasures that at bottom differ only in their duration and intensity; and it is not apparent why happiness in heaven should be any more disreputable as a human goal than happiness on earth. For both the ultimate sanction of morality is self-interest. For both association may attach private pleasures so firmly to the means for their attainment as to render these last an immediate end that does not require reflection on its sanctions. For both the source of duty is an association, which may have lapsed from consciousness, between acts and the command of some superior.

It is true that in Paley's case the will of God stands

behind the end of human happiness to lend it force; and he recognizes as a source of the knowledge of God's will not merely what we learn of this indirectly through a study of social consequences, but the express and particular revelation of the Scriptures. Religion, however, is not the only tool that may be used for justifying in a more or less arbitrary way ethical practices for which we want to find a justification; even the secular principle of the general welfare can be diverted into very devious channels. And it does not follow, in theory at least, that moral laws are of necessity rendered arbitrary by being traced to God as their source. Paley is resting morality, as did the Utilitarians though in a different fashion, on what in the universe is for him most real; and the moral experience does not in any obvious way take additional luster from the supposition that "reality" is a non-moral realm of natural law rather than a personal God. Paley does not hold that morality is created by a fiat of the divine will. Metaphysical questions of this sort he expressly sidetracks as lying outside his interest; in what he says about the will of God he is thinking of the sanctions of morality rather than of its source. There may very well be good reason to believe that divinity supplies an unsound basis for the science of ethics. But this shifts the immediate controversy from ethics to Christian evidences. And Paley certainly is justified in complaining that *if* one accepts popular Christianity with its doctrine of rewards and punishments, it is quite illogical, to say nothing of the irreverence it involves, to ignore this as a human motive of the first importance.

For Paley—and this is not entirely to his discredit—is concerned with ethics primarily as an actual working force in human life; it is the science which teaches men their duty and the reasons for it.[8] Now Utilitarian theories have often suffered here from a practical deficiency; the motives they offer to induce the individual to sacrifice his

[8] *Moral and Political Philosophy,* Bk. I, Ch. i.

own pleasure to the happiness of society have not been equal to the task. What they do is to prove to him that it is to his interest to obey the rules by which public order is promoted, *provided* he does not see his way to retain the benefits of society while evading its responsibilities. And the only argument against making this last attempt is the general argument in terms of the attendant risks. But there always will be plenty of men who are willing to take a chance if it seems likely to be worth their while; and such men the Utilitarian, in the absence of any intrinsic reason for preferring virtue, has no effective way of reaching. A very slight knowledge of logic is enough to show that the mere fact that my unsocial conduct, if made a general rule, would injure me along with others has no power to deter me so long as I am pretty well assured that my example is not likely to be widely followed. Society may at some future time be so arranged as to convince everybody that it always pays him personally to obey the law. But possible penalties in a future era will mean nothing to the present generation, with which the reformer has to deal; the only thing that would really clinch the argument would be a proof that a man's apparent chances of evasion are illusory. This is what the belief in a righteous judge of the world accomplishes. And if, accordingly, a man possesses independently such a belief, and can presuppose its presence in others, he not only is perfectly justified in making use of it, but he has a real advantage over theorists who can only appeal to human and decidedly uncertain sanctions. It is for the same pragmatic reason that Paley prefers his own type of theory to one that appeals to moral instincts. It is impossible to demonstrate that such instincts may not exist. But God's authority offers a basis of morals so much safer and stronger that we may set aside the question as one of curious speculation merely.[9]

Meanwhile, notwithstanding Paley's frank recognition

[9] Bk. I, Ch. v.

that "duty" is no more than prudence applied to the affairs of a future life,[10] the fact should not be overlooked that there is for him a genuine difference in human ideals of happiness quite apart from any supernatural penalties annexed. He declines, indeed, to be dogmatic in choosing between the different accredited brands of happiness; and in general his views of life show a tolerance not always found in ethical philosophers. But he finds a strong experimental presumption in favor of that condition of life in which men generally appear most cheerful and contented—an ideal whose modest content takes the form of health and prudence in bodily habits, the indulgence of the social affections, and the exercise of the faculties in an active pursuit of some engaging and fruitful kind.[11]

3. The theological features of Paley's theory, then, ought not properly to get the chief credit for such consequences as have laid him open to criticism. Polemical requirements may lead, as in Paley's case they did lead, to a disposition to minimize the facts of evil in society in the interests of the argument from design. So, too, a belief in revelation has on the whole a tendency to set up a standard of established truth which discourages a man from entertaining novelties of doctrine in the connected field of conduct. But so long as it remains as simple a matter as it has always proved to be to interpret revelation to suit our needs, there is no real necessity for this. A Christian will be as conservative or as radical as he pleases, according as his temper of mind dictates. Religion has fostered both moods; and if it commonly has stood for conservatism rather than for progress, this is not because it is religion, but because the Church is composed of human beings, among whom the lovers of stability have always outnumbered the lovers of change. In its beginnings a new religion almost always tends to radicalism. But in any case revelation plays a very minor part with Paley in determining the nature of a

[10] Bk. II, Ch. iii.

[11] Bk. I, Ch. vi.

man's duties. Generally speaking it is the public benefit to which he looks for settling the direction of God's will and the content of the good; and there is no logical reason why this content should not have represented almost any degree of liberalism.

As a matter of fact Paley's reputation for conservatism is commonly a little overdrawn. Paley takes the principle of utility quite seriously, as a conscious alternative alike to the inertia of custom, the sentimental claims of the familiar, and the sacrosanct qualities of "natural law." Even the institutions of the Church are argued about explicitly, and with a considerable degree of freedom, in terms of their expediency, and in express opposition to a spirit of uncritical reverence for the past. Paley admits, and even emphasizes now and then, the necessity for changes and reforms when these can be shown unambiguously to mean an increase of the public happiness, and can be effected without public inconvenience; it is worth noting that of the three reasons which he urges against the contract theory of government two are based on the undue difficulty which the theory places in the way of change, while even the third and more conservative objection—that a violation of the contract by a ruler would logically release the subject from the duty of obedience—is accompanied by a recognition that revolutions are justifiable at times, and that it may become as much a duty to resist government as on another occasion to obey it.[12] And although he insists on the necessity of ranks and inequalities in society for the sake of the general good, at the same time he allows that subordination is in itself an evil and ought never to be carried a tittle beyond what the greater good—the peaceable government of the community—requires.[13]

Likewise when he comes to a discussion of the personal duties and virtues Paley sometimes shows an unexpected sympathy, in view of his general reputation as a rather

[12] Bk. VI, Ch. iii.

[13] Bk. III, Pt. II, Ch. i; Bk. V, Ch. iv.

worldly Christian, for deviations from the practices of respectable society in the direction set by the more difficult sayings of the Gospels. To be sure, there is presumably something wrong with a theory which finds the chief field of practical ethics in charity to one's inferiors—worldly prudence will usually, Paley thinks, be enough to direct our conduct toward our superiors, and politeness toward our equals—and which sets its chief motive—compassion—apart from any connection with the claims of social justice by regarding it as a palliation which God has mercifully implanted in human nature as a remedy for those necessary inequalities and distresses which he foresaw that many must be exposed to under every general rule for the distribution of property.[14] Still there is a kindly spirit evidenced in this insistence on the just claims which those less fortunately placed have upon the well-to-do—it is not the rich man, Paley remarks, who maintains his dependents, but his servants who maintain him—that gives a not unfavorable impression of his character.

At the same time the judgment calls for an immediate qualification. It is only in connection with the "passive" and strictly personal virtues—"of all others the severest and the most sublime, of all others perhaps the most acceptable to the Deity"—that Paley shows any taint of sympathy with moral radicalism; social institutions, though he admits in theory that they may need a change, he is in practice strongly disposed always to find rational grounds for keeping as they are. The general drift of his reasoning is that, unless we can be very confident indeed that a change is going to be a decided improvement, it is better not to change, since any dislocation of habits of thought or action has attendant evils and diminishes the stability of government. Whether this argument will lead to sound conclusions will depend a good deal on the prepossessions of the one who uses it. And Paley, who is conspicuously without

[14] Book II, Pt. II, Chs. i, v.

the gift of social imagination, has much less difficulty in discovering the good points in an accepted institutional practice than in conceiving a workable alternative to it. Thus he finds it possible to range reason and utility on the side of such things as rotten boroughs, the death penalty for sheep-stealing, and the jailing of debtors. A politician, Paley writes, who should sit down to delineate a plan for the dispensation of public justice guarded against all access to influence and corruption, and bringing together the separate advantages of knowledge and impartiality, would find that he had been transcribing the judicial constitution of England.[15] It is no occasion for surprise if the temper of mind which this reveals was not felt as congenial by Bentham and his followers.

The ultimate logical justification of Paley's conservative bias may be looked for in one Lockian doctrine in particular to which he gives a prominent place—the importance and necessity of general rules. It is in this way that God is enabled to conduct the governance of mankind, by means of rewards and penalties that can attach only to regulations that are not subject to exceptions if they are to influence the conduct of reasonable creatures. The same authority belongs indirectly to the general laws and customs of civil society, through the recognition that government, as necessary to human happiness, is a part of God's law as well, and enlists divine penalties against whoever ventures to refuse obedience. By recognizing the "law of the land" as a blanket form of justification, Paley is able to bring many things within the scope of duty for which he admits there is no foundation in abstract justice or even in expediency—for example, the right to the possession of more property than the owner really needs. There is the same sin in dispossessing a man by fraud or violence of an estate which he holds by an arbitrary or absurd rule of the civil community as if the law of property came straight from

[15] Bk. III, Pt. I, Ch. x; Bk. VI, Chs. vii, viii, ix.

God; and, conversely, so long as we keep within the design of the law, this will justify us *in foro conscientiæ* whatever the equity or expediency of the law itself, though it would be wrong by legal chicanery to convert what in the law was intended for one purpose to a different one.[16]

Generalized moral rules naturally constitute an important item in any ethical program. Nevertheless the connection is a fairly close one between an overemphatic insistence on such rules and that lack of any lively interest in working out new experiments which is the characteristic note of the conservative. Always to stick to rules is to refuse to take a risk. And while this makes it less likely, perhaps, that the worst will happen, it also lessens the chances for the best; it means putting up in many cases with a mediocre good and magnifying its familiar merits because we fear to lose it if we aim at something better. General rules, again, are in the primary interest of an assemblage of men rather than of the individual. Having the average man in view, they necessarily gravitate toward a merely average welfare; and the result may in the end be a diminution of good even from the social standpoint. At any rate there is an even chance that this will happen, and that the insistence on the "social" may, in consequence, have just the opposite effect from that which the Utilitarians thought it bound to have, serving, as in Paley's case, to slow down rather than to quicken the spirit of reform.

4. In turning to David Hartley we are brought closer to Utilitarianism in its classical expression. It is he who supplies the psychological foundation on which Utilitarianism rests, in the form of a more thoroughgoing doctrine of the association of ideas than had heretofore been attempted; though the radical social and religious implications of Benthamism still remain in abeyance. In theory all human ends are reduced by Hartley, as they were later by James Mill, to associations in which units of physical pleasure

[16] Bk. II, Chs. vii, x; Bk. III, Pt. I, Ch. iv.

supply the ultimate content. Hartley has a hierarchy of motives starting from sensation and passing, through imagination, ambition—by which he means the sense of shame and honor—and self-interest, to the peculiarly ethical motives of sympathy, theopathy, and the moral sense. This last is defined as an immediate pleasure and self-approbation, or a corresponding disapprobation, in reflecting on certain dispositions or forms of character, exclusive of any direct explicit consideration of advantages likely to accrue to oneself—a feeling which, being the outcome of a great mass of experience from all sources, is able to employ the force and authority of man's whole nature against any particular part that rebels. In this hierarchy each step is constituted out of the preceding steps through an added complexity of association. The sensationalistic basis of his theory does not, however, prevent Hartley from going on to discredit to a considerable extent the earlier members of the list in favor of the last three, which are the only ones he accepts as ultimate ends of conduct.[17] He even turns his association doctrine ingeniously to the service of his native piety, by urging that, since God is the source of all good things, in the end every association of pleasure will center about God's nature; he will absorb all lesser ideas and will become the final end of conduct.[18]

It is this unusual mixture of a religious interest with a faith in the potency of a materialistic and mechanistic science which gives the tone to Hartley's ethical system, and enables him to combine a naturalistic explanation with an idealistic goal. Mainly he does this through the medium of a doctrine which, freed from its connection with religion, continued to play an important part in later Utilitarian theory—the supposition that while the higher ends are constituted out of sense pleasures, in their new association these pleasures undergo an alchemy which transforms them

[17] *Observations on Man,* Pt. I, Ch. iv, Secs. 4-6; Pt. II, Ch. iii, Secs. 6-8.
[18] Pt. I, Ch. i, Sec. 3, Prop. 22, Cor. 4.

into essentially novel products, no longer pursued for the sake of their component elements, but disinterestedly on their own account. By forgetting their lowly origin we thus may reap the same moral advantages that their more orthodox eulogists have claimed. This seems on the whole an improvement over the derivation of a disinterested love of God from the one selfish motive of a desire for personal salvation; but it still presents difficulties to one less under the sway of an instinctive piety than Hartley was.

CHAPTER XIV

UTILITARIANISM

Bentham · James Mill

1. One of the temptations of the critical intellect has been always to approach opinions in the light of a stereotyped historical meaning which has only to receive its appropriate label to suggest at once its merits and defects. Bentham has suffered particularly in this respect. His critics have commonly been philosophers concerned with standardized problems that have emerged in the history of ethical speculation. But Bentham himself was not a philosopher in the narrow sense. He was interested in the concrete matter of legal and legislative reform on the basis of rational principles; and many of the theoretical questions that had come to occupy the ethicists seem to him irrelevant and trifling. It was, indeed, little short of treason in the minds of the earlier Utilitarians to entertain the thought that there was anything to learn from the bad philosophies of the past. Accordingly Bentham's opinions do not spring from the same mental background as do those of the professional metaphysicians; and if this is not realized he will often seem to be pronouncing a deliberate judgment on problems which had never seriously occupied his thoughts.

It is necessary to remember this even when he seems to enter the field of philosophy proper. Bentham's incursion into ontology is for the sake of establishing one fundamental point in particular, which is presupposed in nearly everything he has to say. This is the thesis that all abstract or general terms, including terms that stand for relations, are fictitious or purely verbal entities, and that the only

thing real is this, that, or the other concrete instance open to perception.[1] If a philosopher were to make such a claim, the critic would be justified in calling him to account for a variety of consequences to which he would be logically committed, and in branding him with technical names devised to express differences of metaphysical standpoint. But in Bentham's case the significance of such an attempt at classification can easily be exaggerated. It is true there are dubious aspects of his doctrine which affect the credibility of his own conclusions. Many of these terms, including some in which Bentham is particularly interested, are very inadequately treated even for practical purposes when they are regarded merely as vocal signs to call to mind a multitude of identifiable particulars. Thus to say that habit is nothing whatever over and above a group of repeated instances, or an "assemblage of acts," is to overlook causal agencies in the human body which have an important bearing on conduct and its understanding. And in particular the description of human happiness solely in terms of an aggregate of separate pleasures does obvious injustice to the organic connectedness of experience. The result is that tendency to break up ethical concepts into isolated elements or fragments to the exclusion of their subtler relationships in the life alike of body and of soul, which continues throughout the history of the Utilitarian school to impoverish its methods of ethical analysis.

But the deficiency can be made too much of, since it is irrelevant in an important sense to Bentham's chief interest. This has to do with the consequences for which he sees such fictitious entities responsible. It is unquestionably true that the practice of thinking and talking in abstract terms, as if these were on a par with concrete facts, is the source not only of much muddy thinking, but of many practical abuses also. Words such as piety, liberty, justice, honor, patriotism, have often been employed in exactly the oppo-

[1] *Cf. A Fragment on Ontology* in Vol. VIII of Bowring's edition.

site interests to those they are presumed to stand for, when convention and unanalyzed sentiment are allowed to supplant a realistic scrutiny of the particular case. Against this readiness of the human mind to be impressed by glittering generalities and eulogistic terms—the fig leaves, as Bentham puts it, for covering the unseemly parts of the mind—without much regard to the legitimate use of terms as counters to stand for a particular sort of observable fact, the batteries of Bentham's logic are everywhere directed.

And it is in the light of this that his theoretical formulation of principles has to be interpreted, including the fundamental principle which underlies his ethical pronouncements. The thesis that pleasure, or the avoidance of pain, is the sole end of human action and constitutes the sole content of the good, is primarily a demand that we interpret the good in terms of concrete facts of feeling to be verified directly in each man's own experience, and not through the sentimental force of fictitious entities taken as if they conveyed a direct and self-evident meaning of their own which needs no definition, whereas their only meaning, and that which alone prevents them from being mere vocal sounds, is to be found in the particular facts they were brought into being to suggest to the mind.[2]

Starting from this, then, Bentham's account of the ethical situation is simple and comparatively self-consistent. Since the welfare of society is nothing but the sum of the interests of its several members, it is necessary to know the interest of the individual first. This consists in securing for oneself the greatest possible amount of happiness with the least possible amount of pain; the ablest moralist will be he who best calculates the maximum of happiness, and the most virtuous man he who most successfully applies right calculation to conduct. It is the business of the ethical philosopher not to lecture people on their duty in the tone

[2] *Tables of the Springs of Action,* Vol. I, p. 211.

of the pedagogue or the magistrate, on the implicit assumption that he, the philosopher, is strong and wise and knowing and virtuous, and his readers weak and foolish and ignorant and vicious; his task is to call attention to possibilities in the way of desirable or undesirable consequences that are in danger of being overlooked, and to show how erroneous an estimate the vicious man makes of pains and pleasures. In this calculation we need to take account not only of the intensity and duration of pleasures, but of their certainty, propinquity purity, fecundity, and extent. On such a showing duty, or obligation, naturally takes a second place. The only meaning duty properly carries is in terms of penalties or sanctions. That is my duty to do which I am liable to be punished according to law for not doing; apart from the motive thus supplied the only thing left for a man to mean when he talks of right or duty is that he finds himself pleased or displeased in thinking of some point of conduct without being able to tell why. It is impossible, therefore, to define virtue in terms of duty. Virtue is simply such an endeavor to secure happiness as involves the need of foresight and effort—the sacrifice, that is, of a smaller present satisfaction, in the shape of a temptation, to a satisfaction of greater magnitude, but more remote.[3]

Bentham proceeds to draw up an exhaustive list of the various pleasures and pains to which human nature is open. Man's fundamental interests, from which pleasures flow, he classifies characteristically—in most cases the terms explain themselves—as the interest of the palate and bottle, the sexual interest, the interest of the senses, of the purse, the scepter, the spying glass (curiosity), the closet (amity, or the desire of obtaining a share in the good will and therein in the eventual good offices of this or that par-

[3] *Deontology,* I, 13, 31, 156; II, 77; *Tables of the Springs of Action,* I, 206; *Fragment on Government,* I, 293.

ticular individual), the trumpet, the altar, the heart, the gall bladder, the pillow, existence and self-preservation.[4] The only distinction involved in this calling for notice concerns the pleasures of the heart and of the gall bladder. All the other motives are self-regarding; it is the agent's own pleasure which immediately appeals to him. But Bentham allows that also there is such a thing in human nature as other-regarding motives, represented by sympathy and malevolence. Sympathy would not constitute a motive, it is true, were it not that the pleasure of others gives me pleasure also; [5] still we are to accept the apparent fact that my pleasure is conditioned here by an interest in these outside pleasures prior to any thought of itself.

Bentham has, however, no disposition to overestimate the force of the sympathetic motive as compared with selfish ones. It cannot be trusted by itself; and of the two fundamental virtues—prudence and effective benevolence[6]—he assigns to prudence much the more important moral rôle. Even in what goes by the name of benevolence only a small remnant would be left if we were to subtract the self-regarding elements; in its universal form a man is induced to act upon it for the most part by reason of the contribution it makes to the general goodwill fund from which drafts in his own favor may come to be paid.[7] Still, sympathy or good will has the very considerable advantage, from the standpoint of the moralist, that of all the motives it is the one least apt to give rise to a conflict between the individual and the social good, and so is most likely to coincide with utility; and accordingly it stands, along with two of the self-regarding motives—the love of reputation and amity—as particularly worth cultivating in the interest of the general happiness.[8]

[4] *Tables of the Springs of Action.*
[5] *Ibid.*, 212. [6] *Deontology*, I, 201. [7] *Ibid.*, II, 263.
[8] *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Ch. x, Sec. 36*sq*.

2. But while now the motives to conduct are thus primarily in terms of pleasure to the agent himself—it is the first law of nature, says Bentham, to wish our own happiness [9]—the *standard* which he appeals to is, it is essential to observe, not the agent's happiness, but pleasure in the bulk—the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The way in which this shift is to be effected constitutes a standing problem in Utilitarian ethics. For the moment, however, it will be enough to take it for granted, and to indicate the bearing it has on Bentham's theory.

To the test which settles the goodness or badness of an act by its concrete results for human happiness—utility meaning, of course, usefulness for bringing these pleasant results about—there are, so Bentham thinks, only two alternatives. An ethical theory which does not accept utility must either say that *un*happiness is good—which is the principle of asceticism—or else that the good is anything toward which I, or anybody else, happens to feel a sentiment of liking or approval. It is this last principle of "caprice," in the form either of a despotic forcing of my own special preference on everyone else, or of an anarchical acceptance of all sorts of contradictory preferences, under which most of the historical theories of ethics fall; and it is sufficiently condemned by the mere statement of its nature.[10]

A further conclusion of speculative importance, drawn by Bentham from the utility criterion, is that the goodness of an act depends entirely on its intention, and not upon its motive. By intention Bentham means primarily the objective action aimed at or desired; but for practical purposes it includes also the entire group of consequences which are before the mind of the agent when he acts, or which might have been recognized by him had he used ordinary caution and judgment. It is solely by the felicific value

[9] *Deontology,* I, 17.

[10] *Principles of Morals,* Ch. ii.

of these intended consequences that the act is to be judged.[11]

By a motive, on the other hand, Bentham intends to distinguish the *cause* of the intention, as a desire for this or that particular sort of pleasure moving the will to action; whether we are to take its motive force as lying in the prospect of a future pleasure, or, with Locke, in the present uneasiness of desire, Bentham, with his usual indifference to the finer points of analysis, sets aside as a merely verbal query.[12] Desires will always be present within the intention to give it active force, one of them commonly standing out as preëminently *the* motive. But also it follows that no motive in itself is bad; [13] the value of a motive will be entirely dependent on the total consequences—intended consequences of course, since without intention nothing comes within the compass of morality—of the act to which it leads. Benevolence is not virtuous when it gratifies a benevolent motive—by giving alms to beggars, for example—in a way that really harms the recipient or entails on society added demands for charity. And on the same showing we cannot morally condemn malevolence in the cases, somewhat rare indeed, where it performs a public service, as when personal enmity prompts a man to bring to justice an enemy who has committed a crime. That the object of approval or condemnation is not the motive is further shown by the fact that the same motive may be the source of various acts differing in moral quality; thus the abolition of the slave trade and the tortures of the Inquisition might both be said to spring from benevolence. It may sound a little strange to say that lust and avarice are in themselves not bad. But this is only because such terms have been preëmpted by language to convey the notion of moral censure, and so carry over to the desires themselves the feeling aroused when the desire leads to unpleas-

[11] *Ibid.*, Chs. viii, ix.
[12] *Ibid.*, Ch. x, Sec. 7, Note.
[13] *Ibid.*, x, 10*sq.*

ant consequences. In fact we might even say that, *as such,* every motive is a good motive, since it never aims at anything but pleasure, and since in so far as a thing is pleasant it is good.

There are three forms of sanction for moral actions which Bentham distinguishes—the political, the religious, and the moral, by which last he means a liability to popular hostility and a loss of reputation. But the religious sanction is for Bentham not important; and the moral or popular sanction belongs chiefly to the domain of private ethics, with which he does not profess to deal. His own interest is almost wholly in the political sanction, regarded as a means by which society is enabled to add inducements to conduct that is for the public welfare.

It is because the legislative use of rewards and punishments presupposes that we already have a way of knowing what sort of conduct is desirable as a goal at which society shall aim, that the utility doctrine had first to be given a psychological expression, in order to serve as a practical method for determining what acts in particular are to be approved as good or disapproved as bad. This last is an interest that had seldom heretofore been a leading one in ethical theory. Philosophers had been engaged with the metaphysical principle of the good as such, with the promotion of ideals of character as a defense against the buffets of fortune, with a justification of the goodness and the authority of God or of organized society, with a psychological analysis of ethical concepts. But the critical application of ethical principles to the particulars of conduct had usually not concerned them greatly, except as it was conceived that the whole system of accepted morals could be shown to follow automatically from such blanket terms as perfection, health of soul, reason, or the authority of the state. And this was a not unreasonable attitude so long as right conduct was supposed to be identical on the whole with current ideals and practices. But when the pur-

pose of the ethicist involved calling in question existing standards, it became necessary for him, since he no longer was able to count on a general sympathy to recommend his conclusions, to pay closer attention to the connection between his principle and the particular demands of action, so as to be in a position to point out *why* one course of action, often an unpopular one, ought to be preferred to another course more generally approved.

3. For such a purpose the greatest happiness principle did really work; indeed, so long as one sticks to the particular and limited point of view involved in a reforming interest it might be found difficult to improve upon it. It is at least self-evident that if we start, with the Utilitarians, by looking for a rational test of socially right action which the state by its authority is called on to enforce, we shall only find this in some form of social welfare, and not in the *status quo,* in unctuous feeling, or in the will of God; and it is only a shade less evident that man's welfare is in some meaning of the term his happiness. People may dispute in what real happiness consists; and for such disputes the Utilitarian formula leaves plenty of room. But happiness cannot possibly be separated from pleasurable feeling and leave the term any meaning. And the more human history is examined, the more evidence will accumulate for Bentham's claim that only when political formulas and ideals are translated into perfectly concrete terms of individual well-being have we any assurance that they will be used for ends that the enlightened moral judgment can approve. The thesis has its limitations, and there are problems that it hardly professes to touch. But for the purpose of the legislator this is not specially significant. Social action can and does proceed on the assumption that individuals must subordinate themselves to the good of the community, without feeling it necessary to find for this any more fundamental reason.

And within the limits of this special interest most of

Bentham's main contentions may be justified. If we are looking for the test of socially allowable conduct, it must be the consequences that determine our judgment rather than the dominant motive in the agent's mind. Not only are particular motives not open to human observation with any strictness, but even if they were they are not a sufficient substitute for actual results. The Utilitarian might grant that a difference in motive ought properly to have an effect upon our judgment of the man himself. But also he would say that the only political test of a good man or citizen is in terms of the real value of his services, just as the test of a political measure is not the motives of its advocates, but the practical effects it will produce.

So likewise it is possible to make out a case for Bentham's hedonistic calculus as against attacks upon its mechanical and materialistic character. Whatever may be true of more personal decisions, at least it is arguable that *social* action is most effective when it bases judgment on a pretty concrete and unidealistic view of pain and pleasure. This is the accepted attitude in that sphere of social compulsion whose justification is least ambiguous—the restrictive field which attempts to prevent the interference by one man with the good of another. Here the standard is frankly determined by considerations largely quantitative, and in terms for the most part of those palpable injuries which all men agree are such; attempts to inflict social penalties on the basis of the more intangible and spiritual values, such as aesthetic sensibility or the demands of personal honor, are looked on with suspicion. On the side of education, social pressure may more properly be exerted in the interest of these "higher" values; but it is bound to be at some considerable risk. An endeavor to apply social coercion in the interest of any given type of morality or culture is an almost certain way of checking healthy spiritual growth and solidifying ideals that are sure to be intricately bound up with special class interests. A very casual

view of church establishments, of national academies designed to set up authoritative standards in the arts and sciences, of systems of rewarding distinguished merit, will always disclose consequences that seriously cloud their title to be regarded as unqualified social assets. The same thing is true in general on the side of positive motivation. It is no doubt very desirable that men should be virtuous from higher motives. But the conscious attempt to utilize these motives socially has so far been rewarded with doubtful success; it is an open question whether the unadorned desire to better one's condition is not on the whole a more effective tool of social reform than appeals to idealism and philanthropy, however noble.

But while as a social and political method Benthamism has thus at the lowest estimate very substantial elements of truth, and quite possibly is a more defensible philosophy than its rivals, one cannot call attention to these merits without at the same time suggesting qualifications. Its claims, plausible within the sphere to which they originally belong, are by no means obviously valid when we turn to the inner life of the individual. Of the discrepancy here Bentham himself is not very acutely aware, his mind being occupied with more solid matters. "The art of legislation teaches how a multitude of men composing a community may be disposed to pursue that course which upon the whole is the most conducive to the happiness of the whole community, by means of motives to be applied by the legislator";[14] and with this end in view he cares less for the subtler analysis of the springs of conduct than for listing them as practical tools of legislative work. The only difference he recognizes between public and individual ethics is that the former does not deal with every act, but only with such as are subject to compulsion; and his own interest in the more inclusive field of private morality tends to stop with the question—still a legislative question—as to where

[14] *Ibid.*, xix, 20.

the proper limits of a governmental use of sanctions lie. Of the three problems of ethics which he distinguishes—the origin of a moral sentiment, the possibility on reflection of justifying it to oneself as a motive so that it shall be persisted in, and the possibility of a general justification by a person addressing himself to the community—the first two he dismisses as speculative merely, and therefore unimportant; the third alone is of practical concern for legislation.[15] Nevertheless for the thinker who does happen to be interested in understanding ethics rather than in applying it, and even for the philosophic legislator who is not content to take his premises on trust, it is hardly possible to avoid going behind the immediate returns and giving some attention not only to the content of social good, but to the ideals and motives that rule the individual on whom this good depends.

And a critical examination will then disclose a measure of apparent inconsistency between the standard we are accustomed to accept as the basis of social conduct, and the motives within a man's own breast that influence this acceptance. The criterion is the general happiness. But it at least is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive any motive as making a personal appeal unless our own satisfaction in some form is involved. And *why* should we find satisfaction in other people's happiness, so that this shall be taken as our standard? When a conflict arises, as it often will, why should we subordinate our private interest to the general good? Bentham himself puts aside the whole question with a casual reference to the existence of social or semi-social motives such as sympathy, amity, and the love of reputation; if any strict proof of the principle of utility is impossible, so also it is needless, since people generally can be counted on to take it for granted.[16] The intellectual difficulty still remains, however; and any genuinely philosophical completion of Benthamism will have to fill in the

[15] *Ibid.*, ii, 14, Note.

[16] *Ibid.*, xix, 7; i, 11.

gap and attach the psychological basis of conduct more closely to the external and political one.

4. The problem that confronts Benthamism may be given another formulation in terms of a preceding type of ethical theory which Bentham rejects with some disdain. This is the theory of which Hutcheson had been the most clear-sighted advocate, namely, that the difference between the moral and the unmoral rests ultimately on an instinctive feeling of approval or disapproval. Bentham's objection to this has been referred to; and from his practical standpoint it has force. If a man, in order to defend a given practice, has only to say that he is in possession of a private feeling of approval toward it or of dislike for its opposite, the chances of rational discussion will be no doubt unhappily curtailed. But the possibility that a thing may be abused is no decisive reason for rejecting it; and Bentham's treatment does less than justice to the real strength of Hutcheson's contention.

For Bentham takes approval uniformly as a principle that competes with and attempts to displace the reference to utility; and while this is as a matter of fact close to the outcome of the popular conception of conscience as a moral faculty, it is not the way in which men like Hutcheson proposed to view the matter. With them the moral sense is less a rational principle than a psychological datum; and this datum it is recognized will need to be supplemented by principles, which in Hutcheson's case are summed up precisely in terms of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Bentham urges, as many of the critics of sentiment since have urged, that because the feeling of approval differs widely at different times and with different persons, a resort to it will make the ethical judgment utterly shifting and unreliable, and at the mercy of caprice. But while this follows if the bare presence of the feeling is the final test, it does not follow in the least if we hold that the sense of approval, while an underlying condition of any value

judgment, nevertheless needs to be tested and rationally justified before we can trust it implicitly in the particular case. The feeling is a safe guide, that is, only when we have analyzed the situation, got rid of confusing complications and associations, and then have discovered that the feeling still persists in arising in a mind freed as far as possible from emotional prejudices and uncriticized assumptions. Hutcheson's thesis will involve moral chaos only in case we suppose that human nature has no settled character to steady and universalize the expression of sentiment, so that what we "feel" is wholly at the mercy of casual circumstances or an arbitrary will. If the fact that possibilities of variation still remain is fatal to the theory, it is equally fatal to Utilitarianism, since what men call pleasure also varies within wide limits.

In point of fact Bentham himself sees that his own formula is one of the things that may be made, and recommended as, an object of approval;[17] but he fails to recognize the importance of the admission for any ethical analysis that is not content to stop with unexamined premises. A theory which reduces ethical conduct solely to calculations of individual self-interest in terms of quantity of pleasure, or force of desire, may be able to get along with nothing but the machinery of wants, and a cool consideration of the means to their satisfaction. But the substitution of the happiness of all for the happiness of each puts the whole matter on a different footing, as the later Benthamites were themselves quite ready to insist when defending their system against the charge of sordidness and egoism. Actually, if not explicitly, they assumed that the man who did not look with approval on this wider good was an inferior type of man, who ought to approve whether he did approve or not. But in such a case the feeling of approval will stand for no purely personal preference which, as personal, has no relevance to a general

[17] *Ibid.*, i, 2, Note.

standard. It is bound up with the very nature of the standard, which, accordingly, can no more be understood scientifically without some understanding of the state of mind which recognizes it than sense qualities can be understood without investigating the nature of sensation. Otherwise when Bentham talks of duty, and of right and wrong, he is merely identifying the words with the uncritically accepted right of society to coerce individuals; and so long as there have been people in plenty who have questioned this right, he cannot simply overbear them with an appeal to customary ways of thinking without being false to the demands of his own philosophy.

5. The problems which Bentham passes over receive their typical answer among his followers in terms of Hartley's theory of the association of ideas, which enters into combination with utilitarianism in ethics to constitute the classical Utilitarian philosophy. The outlines of the answer stand out most nakedly in James Mill's *Analysis of the Human Mind.* What we have to explain is, in particular, the psychological genesis of the feelings, including the feeling of moral approval, which enter into the ethical experience—a task that also will involve explaining how the social good comes to be attached to private pleasure so as to constitute a motive. The point of the solution is contained in the phrase "inseparable association." Mill works this out in great detail in connection with the various sentiments and affections; but as the principle is the same throughout one or two sample cases will suffice.

The stock illustration among the Utilitarians of the possibility that what originally was only a means to some pleasure may turn into an end interesting on its own account, is the case of the miser. Money obviously, to any rational mind, can be justified only by the pleasures which it buys; and yet frequently we come across people who apparently have forgotten how to enjoy these pleasures in the mere joy of heaping up wealth of which they never

can make use. In a comparable way, then, parental affection may be accounted for, without assuming any necessary tie of nature binding parent and child together, as a product of experience due to the habitual association of the idea of childhood with a variety of pleasures, until it becomes the object of an affection or disposition seemingly separated from any thought of consequences, though such a thought is in reality always present in an attenuated and fleeting form. Similarly friendship is definable as the association of a greater proportion of our pleasures than usual with the idea of the individual; patriotism is an association of acts leading to the prosperity of our country with our own pleasures which we see to be involved in this; sympathy or love is the thought of the cause of a past agreeable sensation or sensations; and so on. And any such sentiment becomes a "motive" when the idea of the pleasure is connected by association with the idea of an action of our own as its cause.

The explanation of the "moral" sentiments is the same in kind, only a little more complex. In general, morality has to do with acts which it is important to other men that each individual shall perform or abstain from, but in which the individual has not a sufficient interest to secure this outcome. And its peculiar nature arises from a connection formed between the idea of the act and the thought of social consequences, which include in particular the praise and blame of our fellows, susceptibility to these last being itself due to an original association with the advantages and disadvantages that the good or ill will of others brings us. In the first instance the moral judgment is applied to other people. But from this we transfer it to ourselves, through an association made possible partly by the fact that each man's beneficial acts are a portion of the system of acts in which he among others finds his account, and also through the strong association of his own beneficial acts alike with that approval of other men which is of so much

importance to him, and with the approval which he bestows on other men's socially useful conduct.[18]

6. That the association theory throws a good deal of light on the natural history of morals is now generally admitted. Mill is probably justified in supposing that it supplies, in terms of utility, the most useful single method for tracing the growth of primitive morality with its crude, rough-and-ready generalizations. Nor is he far wrong in emphasizing, again on the side of history rather than of critical valuation, its importance for understanding the moral life and moral opinions of the average man even at the present day.

But the method works with much less precision when we turn to the more refined expressions of the moral insight which increasingly characterize ethical growth in its higher stages. Here standards begin to reveal themselves that only by a good deal of forcing can be made to fall in line with the reduction of all motivation to private pleasures quantitatively conceived. Even the Utilitarian does not fail to share the common ethical dislike for the practice of selfish theories of ethics, to which he opposes his own standard of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. His attitude is revealed almost naïvely, as there has been occasion to remark, in his sense of moral superiority to the theological hedonists, who place the final motive for good conduct in the degrading wish to escape eternal punishment and attain eternal bliss. But if asked to show how in the end his own theory differs essentially from theirs, it is not apparent just what the Utilitarian could reply. It would seem he ought to be able to say that there is some quality he perceives which renders the social good inherently superior as an end; but this is what his theory gives him no right to claim. Equally with the theological egoist, his justification turns on his ability to show a relation

[18] *Analysis of the Human Mind,* Vol. II, pp. 258, 295, 300-2 (edited by J. S. Mill); *A. Fragment on Mackintosh,* pp. 249, 375.

between active causes in the world, and consequences in the way of pleasure that terminate in his private consciousness; and while it is arguable that he has the advantage in the realism of his outlook and the accuracy of his reasoning, this relative correctness of opinion gives him no excuse for pluming himself on his superior rectitude or worth.

And for anything the Utilitarian has to show, it is quite conceivable that a still more realistic thinker might reject both conclusions as equally superstitious, and give sound reasons for believing that a wise man, though very likely not a fool, can secure most pleasure by subordinating alike a problematic future destiny and a nice consideration of the rights of others—to say nothing of a concern for that mythical creature "mankind"—to an intelligent and cautious determination to look out for himself at the expense of everybody else. At least the Utilitarian is hardly living up to the requirements of his own empiricism when he passes too lightly back and forth between the consequences that *commonly* follow a certain *sort* of act, and the consequences that can reasonably be expected to follow a given particular act, as if the two things were identical. It is the essence of realistic thinking, so a thoroughgoing egoist might say, that we should not enslave ourselves to generalizations of any kind, but should decide each case upon its merits. Statistical probabilities ought to have their weight. But statistics are not final, else there would never be anything new under the sun; and the example of innumerable statesmen and millionaires ought to teach us that, by choosing his opportunity, an astute man can often sacrifice the general good to his private gain, and still live honored and respected.

The Utilitarian perhaps might say to this, "But you are forgetting the principle of inseparable association." Man is not a mere intellectual adding machine, but a creature formed by countless associations in the past; and he thereby finds himself possessed by various motives which, no mat-

ter how they may have originated, now sway his judgments and introduce into his possibilities of happiness new elements that render pure self-seeking an impracticable method.[19]

But here we come upon the special weakness in the association doctrine. Grant for the moment that associations ever really are inseparable. But then how does the Utilitarian's position have any advantage over the intuitionalism which he is attacking, if both in the end rest on judgments that approve themselves simply because we find it hard to break away from them? To justify himself he must show *why* these approvals of the general good, that have been made inseparable by habit, are to be preferred to any other approvals; and he cannot do this simply by repeating that the happiness of the greatest number is the moral standard. Also, unless some further justification is forthcoming, the practical aims of the Utilitarian philosophy seem to be endangered. If mere repetition can produce an opinion or sentiment that is impregnable to further experience, what real chance is there for the reformer? It is hardly possible to conceive of associations more closely riveted by habit than many of the bad associations—the religious ones, for example—which the Utilitarians deplore; and with these safely holding the field, how can they ever be dislodged? To do this would require a new generation trained from the start to entirely different habits of mind; and it is utopian to expect this so long as it is the present generation always that determines what the training shall be. On the other hand if present habits can be broken, as by the use of rational processes the Utilitarian plainly thinks they may, there is no reason why good associations similarly formed might not be broken also.

This is just the tragedy that John Stuart Mill early came to realize. A connection of ideas that can be made can also be unmade; and, indeed, the more education takes a rational form and encourages the examination and analysis

[19] *Cf. Fragment on Mackintosh,* pp. 51-2.

of our compound mental states, the greater the likelihood that such early associations will be loosened, *unless* the examination discloses something that has a rational as distinct from a mere customary and artificial hold upon the analytic mind. The Utilitarians of course assumed such a permanent and rational bond in the idea of the general happiness. And so long as their own standards are not in question and they can take themselves for granted as reformers, or as people in possession of a higher truth legislating for the less mature, there is no great objection to their assuming this, apart from the practical difficulty of making sure that their prescriptions are not interfered with by too great an independence in their pupils. To justify these superior standards, however, is impossible without bringing up the problem again.

7. Difficulties of this sort present themselves to Mill's theory, even supposing its psychological basis is sound; but as a matter of fact this, too, may be disputed. The transition to the good of others is substantially assisted by the assumption that there is a natural pleasure which we feel in the idea of pleasure as such, irrespective of its location; and therefore that we have only to recognize other people's joys or sorrows to get a starting-point for the associations of sympathy and kindness. There is no very apparent psychological reason, however, why the pleasantness of present feeling should afford any presumption in favor of our finding the "idea" of an absent pleasure also pleasant. Mill's own reason for thus thinking that I take a natural pleasure in my neighbor's pleasure is his belief that the idea of this foreign pleasure *is* nothing but the idea of my own pleasure associated with the idea of another man.[20] The analysis is a questionable one. It is true I should have no conception at all of pleasure unless I had myself actually experienced the feeling; but to say that I can only have a real idea of pleasures *such as* those I myself have felt, is not identical with saying that I can only think of pleasures *which* I

[20] *Analysis of the Human Mind,* Vol. II, p. 217.

myself feel. In any case it would not greatly help Mill's argument if this were true. As a matter of fact the *idea* even of past pleasures of my own is something other than the pleasures themselves, and may be indifferent or actually distasteful. Also it on occasion may be pleasurable. But the fact that no universal rule can be laid down ought to suggest that the reason lies deeper than the mere ideal character of the quality; and the natural reason is that ideas are pleasurable not in their own right, but in so far as they fit into present active desires or propensities located in the organism.

For Mill, however, instead of a future pleasure being dependent, for its pleasureableness in anticipation, on organic desire, desire itself is nothing more than the idea of a pleasure.[21] And we do commonly limit the term "desire" to ends that have entered into consciousness in the form of an idea. But their endeavor to explain the entire psychological life in terms of consciousness alone, or of identifiable bits of mental content, is just what prevents the associationists from ever giving any really intelligible account of its foundations. The organic stresses which under the name of impulse or instinct came later to the front they not only ignore, but they actually repudiate all such terms as a remnant of mystical intuitionism. The notion that men are born into the world with peculiarities of temperament, or with a native disposition toward this or that way of acting, is a fiction; apparent differences of sensibility are nothing but differences of habit or education.[22] For this they have a good logical excuse in their sensationalistic idealism, since an organism that has itself been dissolved into subjective feelings can hardly be expected to play any large part in explaining these same feelings. But the appeal to a dubious metaphysics is not a sufficient basis for conclusions that are out of harmony with the facts.

[21] *Ibid.*, II, 191.

[22] *Cf. ibid.*, II, 259.

CHAPTER XV

UTILITARIANISM (*continued*)

J. S. MILL · BAIN · SIDGWICK

1. THE gaps in the Utilitarian doctrine did not go unrecognized within the school itself. And in the case of John Stuart Mill and of Alexander Bain fairly systematic attempts were made to render it less open to attack; though the emphasis in the two cases is not identical. Bain as a psychologist is interested in the more technical problems of psychological analysis, and rather takes for granted the standard of utility in its ethical aspects. John Mill, on the other hand, while he makes by the way various contributions in the psychological field, is mainly concerned to defend the ethical criterion—the greatest happiness of the greatest number—and to restate it in a manner to show its consistency with the higher demands of the cultivated moral insight, in terms not only of political principles, but of personal conduct and character as well.

Of the two or three points that stand out most prominently in Mill's ethical contributions the most significant in theory is his explicit recognition of the fact, which associationism had tended to obscure, that the human mind makes distinctions among the ends presented to it for which mathematics is hardly competent to account. Mill grants the relative justice of a familiar charge against his predecessors in his doctrine that pleasures differ in quality as well as in quantity. If this is taken seriously, and the distinctiveness of quality is not after all explained away by reducing it to a by-product of association, it is appar-

ently an admission that it is not enough to point to pleasure in order to explain our judgments about the good. If certain kinds of pleasure play a more important part than others in the creation of the moral standard, and for reasons that cannot be carried back to their quantitative aspects, we seem forced to recognize something other than the pleasantness common to all pleasures alike if we are to account for that in which they differ. The very word "quality" implies a standard.

Mill's official explanation of this phenomenon consists of an appeal to the fact that the best men, with an access to pleasures of all sorts, do as a matter of fact prefer certain among them to the rest, these preferred values going to make up a sort of ideal to which is attached a recognition of superior worth. And if this is not to stop with a restatement of the problem, it must signify not simply that the higher quality of pleasure is the one which the expert prefers, but that quality *means* this preference. The higher pleasure is *nothing but* the pleasure which Mill and people like him would take if given their choice.

For such a claim there is, it may be, more to be said than Mill's critics have conceded. It is undeniable that any man may take a greater interest in certain kinds of pleasure, and prefer them to other kinds, on the basis of their intrinsic nature rather than of their intensity. In this there is nothing of necessity to contradict the original tenet of Benthamism. The fact that I am so constituted as not to find satisfaction in all pleasures equally does not interfere with the possibility that the content of the good for me may be made up of those I do approve; a "kind" of pleasure is still a pleasure. Furthermore no good reason is apparent why the preferred pleasure should not be called, for the man who likes it, the more desirable. "Desirable" in such a case would mean, of course, that which is liable to arouse a stronger desire, and not that which "ought" to arouse a stronger desire. But Mill expressly excludes from the term

desirable any reference to the moral "ought." [1] And in any case there is force in the claim that it is nonsense to say a man ought to desire something he does not desire; so that an empirical preference grounded in human nature is the point from which all theories alike must start.

However this is unsafe ground for the Utilitarian. Almost as openly as intuitionalism does, it is making approval the basis of the ethical judgment. It is not even clear that intuitionalism does not have an advantage when it comes to a principle for selecting voters. It may not be a sure way of validating an ethical opinion to count the number of its adherents. Still, when nearly everybody agrees to a thing it does have a certain prestige. But Mill has no ultimate principle of selection at all, since before we can estimate the quality of a judgment by the superiority of the person who pronounces it, we need a standard for picking our superior class. What Mill really does is to rest his case on the preferences of the so-called intellectual classes, or a majority among them. But even apart from a doubt whether the ideals of such a class have anything like the standardized form that is required, not everyone will agree that the *intelligentsia* represent self-evidently the norm by which all other human types are to be measured. Naturally they agree in exalting the intellectual and æsthetic life, since if such interests did not stand first with them they would not be found among the intellectuals. But the proof that this means an absolute superiority still is wanting.

While, therefore, something answering to the description of qualitative difference does patently exist in human judgments about pleasure, it is not enough to stop with the fact that certain men, or all men even, prefer a given kind; reasons are called for to justify their preference. In Mill's treatment there are two hints toward a possible answer. The more explicit is his suggestion that the higher qualities depend on "self-respect," or on the recognition of a dignity

[1] *Utilitarianism,* Ch. ii.

or elevation in human nature which a man of fine moral perception is loath to violate.[2] Here Mill has been influenced by his classical training. In principle his notion of human dignity is not easy to distinguish from the Platonic conception of an essential human nature peculiarly rational, which man does not share with the lower orders, but which raises him to a new and superior level. It is in line with this that Mill, unlike his master Bentham, shows a Platonic distaste for the "gross" pleasures; and he always was inclined, in consequence, to deprecate and ignore the *Deontology,* with its frank and half-malicious flouting of idealistic prejudices. But while the Platonic notion is very likely in some sense defensible, there still must be a reason *why* we feel the way we do—a reason for which the conscientious philosopher is bound to look.

2. And there is one further addition Mill makes to the earlier Utilitarian position which indicates a direction in which he quite definitely was pointed. The impression which the reader gets from Mill's ethical writings, as compared with those of his father or of Bentham, is due chiefly to his sense of the need that we should *feel* truth as well as see it,[3] and to the value which he recognizes, therefore, in a cultivation of the emotional susceptibilities. The new emphasis came about through the realization, early forced upon him, of a difficulty already noticed as implicit in the Utilitarian scheme; the method of analysis, that is, has a tendency to weaken those bonds of external association which it is in the interest of the social welfare to render indissoluble. To counteract this we need to discover something in the inner life to resist the disintegrating effects of philosophy. Mill thought he had found such an antidote in the feelings elicited by poetry and by the humaner social relationships; and thereafter a glow of restrained emotional fervor, which sometimes even runs the risk of interfering

[2] *Ibid.,* Ch. ii.
[3] *Cf. Dissertations and Discussions,* Vol. I, p. 390 (London, 1859).

with his logic, continues to illuminate nearly everything he wrote.

But Mill still remained too much influenced by Bentham's denunciations of sentiment to make any thorough attempt to reëvaluate the moral experience in the light of this new ideal of human dignity which he has accepted as a sound human preference. What instead he is inclined to do is to place feeling judgments alongside the moral judgment proper, not as influencing its formation, but as supplementing its emotional deficiencies. The affections and sympathies on the one hand, and the sense of beauty and fitness on the other, are sentiments not the same as that of morality proper; but the moralist will leave a wrong impression if he ignores them. An action has three distinguishable aspects: it is right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, lovable or hateful; we may approve it, admire it, love or pity it.[4] Bentham was wrong, accordingly, not so much in his explanation of morality as in his failure to give sufficient heed to these other possible forms of human opinion.

Mill's interest in making such a separation is obvious, and up to a point defensible; he wants to take no chance of obscuring the need for an appeal to objective consequences as a standard. The thing which, like the earlier enemies of "sentiment," he fails to recognize sufficiently, is the close interweaving of two elements in the problem which cannot ultimately be kept apart. The Utilitarians seem to be justified in urging that, when one sets out to estimate the moral worth of an act, his eyes should be directed to its real and objective value in the world rather than to the inner feelings of the agent. But the very notion of value implies that, before we start to judge, something must have gained the approval of the reflective mind; and especially if we suppose, with Mill, that competing values are not determined by their bare quantity, but likewise differ in kind, an implicit scale of values must be present

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 387.

before the calculus can proceed. Such values, furthermore, whatever their ultimate source, are revealed to us only in connection with our feelings. And if, accordingly, there can be pointed out closely related judgments of an emotional type, it is natural to anticipate that these last may prove to be of use in explaining the situation out of which moral values themselves spring. Certainly the two judgments—that a lie is wrong, and that a lie is mean [5]—do not seem to be wholly disconnected.

As a matter of fact Mill himself takes a long step toward modifying the narrow and exclusive character of the moral concepts. When he says that we do not call a thing wrong, or speak of moral obligation, unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it,[6] he is no longer, as might at first appear, repeating the Benthamite formula that duty is reducible to social compulsion setting up a new association in connection with acts that the community finds it to its interest to enforce. It is not the feeling called forth by punishment which for Mill explains the idea of duty, but the feeling which leads us to say that an act *ought* to be punished—a feeling that exists not now in the one who undergoes punishment, but in the moral judge.[7] In Mill's most extended account of duty such a feeling element is singled out from all the more external sanctions and made to constitute its essence.[8] And while he still chooses to appeal to the association doctrine for his metaphysics, in reality he shows a disposition in the end to turn to a different standpoint; and the ultimate springs of moral conduct appear as emotional possibilities inherent in human nature which experience uncovers, rather than as artificially, and so more or less precariously, built up from simpler pleasures by the associative process.[9]

While, then, Mill fails to correct in any very clear way

[5] *Cf. ibid.*, I, 387.
[6] *Utilitarianism*, Ch. v.
[7] *Analysis of the Human Mind*, Vol. II, p. 325 (Note by J. S. Mill).
[8] *Utilitarianism*, Ch. iii.
[9] *Cf. Analysis*, II, 325.

the formal analysis of his school, indirectly the new elements to which he calls attention serve everywhere to modify the impression which the Utilitarian theory makes, by shifting the emphasis in the pleasure calculus through which a proper human standard is attained. Why certain pleasures are to be given a weight and authority which their quantitative magnitude does not obviously justify remains, indeed, obscure; the fact that they appeal to a developed moral taste does not as such give them any coercive force that would not equally belong to the physical taste of the epicure as against a less cultivated palate. But by those who possess this taste the logical deficiencies are likely to be overlooked. And accordingly when we pass from fundamental analysis to the practical formulation of an ethical ideal, Mill unquestionably shows a finer insight than his predecessors, and the crude machinery of the pleasure calculus becomes in his hands much more adequate to man's needs. Indeed, with his dislike of the selfish egoist "devoid of every feeling or care but those that center in his own miserable individuality," his appreciation of the value of renunciation, and of an ability to go without happiness if need be in this disappointing world, his recognition of the special importance, among consequences, of those on the agent's own frame of mind, and his insistence, therefore, on the part played in the content of happiness by self-respect, the love of virtue, and the disinterested desire for spiritual perfection, it is hard at times to think of Mill as a follower of the cheerful and rather too self-complacent Bentham.[10]

And with these modifications, Bentham's fundamental contention that not conventional formulas, or any abstract form of good, but actual results in terms of happiness for individuals is the only safe guide in trying to regulate the affairs of men, receives a powerful support. One cannot compare Mill's concrete recommendations in the field of practical ethics with the typical outcome of most earlier

[10] *Utilitarianism,* ii, iv; *Dissertations and Discussions,* I, 359, 360.

ethical systems without being constantly impressed by the genuine moral insight to which Utilitarian theory lends itself when utilized by a man with broad human sympathies and a nice sense of relative values. As the Greek tradition, with its emphasis on reason, has a natural logical affinity with conservatism and the defense of established good, so Utilitarianism has a similar relation to the progressive forces in human nature and society. To say that happiness is the only good is automatically to universalize the ethical end, and release it from subservience to all narrower class interests such as usually have no difficulty in interpreting vaguer and nobler formulas to their own advantage. And of the particular form of progress which goes historically under the name of liberalism, Mill is likely to remain in a peculiar sense the representative.

3. Alexander Bain has never struck the public imagination in the same way as have the protagonists of the Utilitarian school. Nevertheless there is some ground for the judgment that Utilitarianism receives at his hands what is on the whole its most adequate theoretical expression. While Bentham and James Mill—and to a lesser extent J. S. Mill—were engaged primarily with the polemical defense of a particular practical attitude against opponents, and were therefore a little apt to minimize the force of objections due largely, as they thought, to a bad heart, Bain is a psychologist first and foremost, taking an interest in any apparent fact of experience that calls for a psychological explanation. And since the essence of Utilitarianism, as theory, is its psychological foundation, he is led in consequence to fill in lacunæ left by earlier Utilitarian writers, if not in every case satisfactorily, at any rate with a clearer appreciation of the logical demands.

In general Bain accepts the outlines already formulated by the Mills; and it will only be necessary to mention the points on which he has something new to say. And the first thing to notice is the firmer foundation he supplies

for psychology through his doctrine of an original spontaneity of movement. Bain does not develop this notion into a very detailed and explicit theory of "instinct" such as a later psychology attempted. But it marks a definite step away from the disposition to think of the life of conduct in terms simply of a passive association of sensations and feelings; and at various points it gives a verisimilitude to his analyses that is lacking in James Mill. Life begins in the form of random movements, some of which chance to lead to an increase of vitality. This last comes to consciousness as the feeling of pleasure which is the concomitant of vital energy; and this feeling, in turn, tends to stimulate and to impress more deeply the movement which occasions it, and so render easier its repetition. Likewise, the image of the pleasure persists and gives rise to desire, desire being definable as the memory of a pleasure which through the consciousness that it falls short of the reality acts as a spur to full fruition.[11] The result is the creation of a set of habits through which spontaneity becomes gradually hardened into special forms such as constitute the relatively permanent nature of an individual.

Within this general framework Bain undertakes to meet objections that might be brought against the theory. It is a logical conclusion from the Utilitarian psychology that the one ultimate motive to action is the pleasure which the agent receives or expects to receive. He may be mistaken in this expectation; but in terms of his own conscious intention he cannot possibly aim at anything else. The first objection here is one which the Utilitarians had hardly faced; is it true that a man does always act in the manner which he thinks will give him a maximum of pleasure? Bain sees that there is a formidable array of facts pointing away from this conclusion. Social conduct has always been recognized as presenting many examples of self-sacrifice, where a man acts in the interest of others under circum-

[11] *The Emotions and the Will.* The Emotions. Ch. i, Sec. 17 (3d ed.).

stances that seem to mean less pleasure for himself. The usual explanation had been that he really does not do this, and that if we were to weigh against the pleasures which he loses such pains as come from sympathy, wounded affection, and the pangs of conscience, we should find the balance of pleasure actually on the side of self-sacrifice. But this, Bain sees, is rather to force the note. When a man throws away his life for the sake of a fellow being or of an idea, to urge that otherwise an unending regret would have embittered his days and outweighed the happiness he has sacrificed is surely resting a little heavily on conventional notions of conscience and its power over the mind. Meanwhile there are many other facts of experience that also throw doubt on the thesis. Not only is the common man notoriously careless of his more permanent welfare, but often under the influence of the passions he will do things which he is aware at the time are bound to injure him in the end, and which yet for the moment so fill his mind that he obstinately refuses to give heed to the call of his own recognized self-interest. All these cases may be explained away more or less plausibly; but their elimination nevertheless is against the first appearance of the facts.

The explanation which Bain himself gives involves his theory of emotion. Bain recognizes as moving forces that influence conduct not only the feelings of pleasure and pain, but also vaguer and more diffusive feelings, where the conscious association of the act with pleasure—which is needed to constitute rational motivation—may be obscured. And the activating power of emotion involves in turn a further doctrine. When the original spontaneity of movement has once become defined and connected with the idea of some particular end, the presentation of the associated idea thereafter will be found automatically to lead to action. Accordingly if conditions arise, as they may under the influence of emotion more especially, which fix a given idea in consciousness, action will tend to flow in the channel thus

marked out without much reference to the rational motives of pleasure and pain that ordinarily are the cause of conduct, and even, it may be, in opposition to them. When we thus can discern no connection between pleasure enjoyed and the energy manifested in pursuit, we have what Bain calls a Fixed Idea, or conduct explainable by the undue or morbid persistence of certain ideas in the mind.[12]

The notion of the fixed idea Bain now makes use of to solve the stock difficulty as to why a man should ever be induced, through sympathy, to subordinate his personal happiness to the welfare of the greater number.[13] There exists, no doubt, a variety of personally appealing motives which tends to lessen the paradox here—in particular, the penalties inflicted on unsocial conduct and the positive pleasures of affection that attend human relationships. It may even be possible to account for the first appearance of the sympathetic pleasure without going beyond self-interest, especially if associationism is pieced out by a recognition of the new evolution theory and the doctrine of inherited characters. Grant the existence of pleasures arising from contact with our fellows—the roots of which Bain finds in the pleasures of touch and the embrace—and it seems understandable, especially when we add the obvious benefits to the individual that coöperative action brings, that we might come to be engrossed and fascinated by the thought of the mental states which other people share in common with us, and which in many ways have to be presupposed before our own pleasures are forthcoming.[14] But why should this relatively mild pleasure of association so often persist as a motive on occasions when I not only fail to experience actual pleasure, but when to act in the interest of others is to bring to me personally a preponderance of pain? Bain answers the question by suggesting that sympathy is a fixed idea. In order to have sympathy with

[12] *Ibid.*, The Emotions, i, 14; The Will, v, 5.
[13] *Ibid.*, The Emotions, vi, 12. [14] *Ibid.*, The Emotions, vi, 13.

another we must first ourselves have experienced the same pleasure, and must possess the capacity to remember it, and to recognize the signs of its presence in our fellows. But also, and most important if there is to be any guarantee of our acting on the idea when it involves a sacrifice, it must become automatic and have lost its connection with conscious reason. Only in this way can we account for the fact that we sometimes act in opposition to the "rational" end of our own greatest happiness.

Nor is it difficult along this line to suggest a reason for the further fact that this particular fixed idea stands in much better odor with mankind than others of its class. Its value is obvious in strengthening social cohesion; and it might be expected, in consequence, to win a measure of popular approval, thereby still more firmly riveting its hold. In spite of this, however, sympathy on Bain's interpretation continues to present to the philosopher an appearance of anomaly. This is owing to the fact that, however good the reasons for approving it in general terms, especially as a rule for other people to follow, its hold on the individual is dependent on its still retaining its irrational character, since otherwise I should never act on it save when I found it to my advantage. Its irrationality is just the thing that makes it socially useful as a stop-gap pending the time, still distant, when society shall have arranged its system of penalties in such a fashion as to make social action always pay.[15]

The ethical philosopher finds himself, therefore, in a quandary. As a scientist, it would seem he ought to try to make man everywhere amenable to reason. There is no need to call this impossible, as though sympathy, as a fixed idea, were so invulnerable as to stand out against all rational treatment; action motivated by sympathy is obviously in most cases capable of being modified indefinitely

[15] *Cf. ibid.*, p. 299.

by a consideration of consequences. It is only as a strictly pathological condition that fixed ideas are incapable of rational control, and even then there are regimens which the physician can prescribe. But if he applies such a treatment the philosopher finds himself weakening a valuable social force that makes for harmony and coöperation. His alternative is deliberately to put out of his mind its irrational character, and for the sake of social consequences to train himself to ignore its lack of consistency with what, as a scientist, he recognizes as the rational end of action. The last attitude is the one that Bain's theory supports; but neither as science nor as ethics is it an altogether comfortable one.

4. Questions likewise arise in connection with Bain's account of obligation or of duty, which is the moral sentiment *par excellence*. Bain holds, with the Utilitarians generally, that the differentia of the sense of duty is compulsion. That alone is a duty which authority enforces; and Bain proposes that the field of moral doctrine be confined to the social duties which depend on compulsory law in the interest of public security, and that it be kept separate from the theory of rewards, merits, and virtues, which are the objects of sentimental tastes, and in whose case no compulsion is thought desirable.[16]

And for explaining the origin of a sense of duty thus conceived, a number of psychological considerations are available. It is evident that a conscience of a sort will be created in average human nature if it has been accustomed from childhood to taboos generally agreed upon, and enforced more or less roughly by parents, teachers, neighbors, and the police; under such circumstances it is natural to expect that feelings of restraint will come to attach to forbidden actions which, since they are based on settled habit, reasoning will find it difficult to shake. This leaves

[16] *Ibid.*, The Emotions, xv, 1, 3, 22, 23.

the tradition itself to be accounted for; but here also in general terms the direction in which an answer may be looked for is apparent. The acts which lead a man spontaneously to retaliate against his neighbor are much the same for all, and will therefore be recognized as harmful not only to me, but to the community at large; and as the sense develops of a common interest, certain of these acts will be felt by the majority to call for punishment, and so will form the nucleus of a moral code. Conscience thus starts with actual physical penalties, which persist in imagination, and, through their connection with society as a permanent cause recognized as always standing in wait to chastize offenses, give rise to a massive feeling of terror distinguishable from other fears. This tendency is strengthened by habit. Then it is further strengthened, and modified, by the love and respect we feel for our superiors and the dread of giving them pain. And finally, with an increasing recognition of the meaning and value to our own happiness of these social prohibitions, and with a corresponding development of the sympathetic feelings and pleasures, it takes on a degree of spontaneity and positive force, the sense of restraint giving place to a more or less cheerful and matter-of-fact acquiescence in the moral rules of society.[17]

But one aspect of this development of the ethical sense is less easily disposed of. How does it come about that, in an enlightened conscience, a felt sense of duty may come to attach to acts that set themselves in conscious *opposition* to those social behests which, according to the theory, are the sole occasions for the feeling of obligation? This phenomenon, to which the earlier Utilitarians had paid but scant attention, Bain makes an attempt to account for. And in general his explanation is, that so strong an association has been established between the sentiment or form of

[17] *Ibid.*, The Emotions, xv, 18, 22; The Will, x, 8, 9.

law and the feeling of duty that the latter tends to persist even when the law ceases to come from the outside, and is, instead, a law which we impose upon ourselves.[18]

But this hardly gives enough weight to the peculiarity of the situation. Such a transferred association we seem bound to regard as a relatively weak one; not being backed by the compulsion apart from which duty ordinarily has no standing, it might be expected to yield readily to argument. There are no duties, however, which a man is likely to feel more persistently and sincerely than those to which he has come by the exercise of his independent judgment, and against the customs that rule the social world. It is not as if there existed some strong personal inclination to induce him to set himself against authority and to become a law unto himself; it is precisely when inclination is involved that he does *not* feel himself under the command of duty. A recognition of one's obligation to oppose the settled judgments of organized society means commonly a struggle with personal inclination also, and is almost sure to bring upon the heretic a notably large measure of the penalties which ought in theory to enlist the sense of obligation on the other side. And if he still in spite of this remains true to his own insight, it argues some stronger reason than an imaginary association with a penalty which he knows, when he stops to think for a moment, will never be forthcoming. It is probably true that normally when such a situation arises the dissenter is able to think of himself as supported by a principle which, in other forms, is approved by public judgment and perhaps by law; but this shifts the source of the obligation to principle rather than to penalties. At the least, the theory ought logically to recognize that sticking to a form is irrational when all that gives sanction to the form is lacking, and that morality should in consequence, as indeed conventional morality

[18] *Ibid.*, The Emotions, xv, 20; The Will, x, 10.

does always do, discourage any disposition on the part of the individual to outstrip the demands here and now enforced by existing society.

The fact seem to be that Bain's distinction between prohibitions based on utility and those dictated by a sentiment of distaste is much too sharp and arbitrary. It may be a sound principle that society ought not to use compulsion in the case of acts that merely arouse a personal repugnance and do no further harm. Even here it is so difficult to draw the line that the usefulness of the distinction may be disputed; "harm" is too indefinite a term to give guidance in the cases where we need it most. But in any case the practical advisability of identifying a political principle governing the limits of state action with the moral idea of duty is questionable. If duty is only what society demands under threat of punishment, it becomes impossible for the individual to substitute a better ideal, even the Utilitarian ideal; it is just in the fact that, as a matter of history, the community has *not* subjected its prejudices to the principle of utility that Utilitarianism finds its excuse for being. What the Utilitarian is bound to say is, not that utility *is* the standard, but that it *ought* to be. In that case, however, the meaning of duty has still to be determined; we cannot assert that society *ought* to limit compulsion to certain things if the only meaning of duty is in terms of the compulsion society actually exerts.

5. It is usual, and on the whole defensible, to regard Henry Sidgwick as the last outstanding member of the Utilitarian group. Nevertheless in making this classification it is necessary to add several qualifying clauses. It is the special merit of Sidgwick's treatment that it attempts, and with considerable success, to free itself from partisan considerations, and to take the moral data at their face value as an expression of common human judgments. There perhaps has never been a more searching and unprejudiced examination, at least since Aristotle's day, of the actual facts

about ethical opinion as it exists in the mind of the average person of some intelligence. And one consequence of this is a departure in a number of important ways from the classical position of Utilitarianism. Indeed, Sidgwick might almost be counted as a disciple of Butler, nearly all of whose main contentions appear, more or less modified, in his own outcome.

It becomes easier to place Sidgwick in his relationship to historical schools of ethics if we follow him in the separation which he makes between the two dominant ethical concepts—the "ought" and the "good." The discussion of the second concept is relatively incidental; but it is also simple and unequivocal. Postponing for the moment all question as to whose pleasure we are talking of, Sidgwick takes it as the self-evident testimony of consciousness that the presence of pleasurable feeling of some sort is the indispensable condition of calling anything on calm reflection good.

It is with the notion of duty or of obligation, however, that the theory of ethics chiefly is concerned; and here Sidgwick's conclusions are less simple, and by no means exclusively favorable to Utilitarian hedonism in its historical form. To get their point of view it is necessary to bear in mind his method of approach. Instead of attempting systematically to justify some particular type of theory, his own opinions are introduced only incidentally; the greater part of the *Methods of Ethics,* his most important writing, is devoted to an analysis and interpretation of the different ways in which men actually in practice go to work to decide on matters of duty or of conscience. And there are three general methods which he distinguishes, corresponding to three types of ethical theory in the schools. There is the method of egoistic hedonism, which judges the demands of conduct quantitatively and in terms of private pleasure; there is the method of intuitionism, which finds the criterion of right and wrong in an immediate deliver-

ance of conscience independent of any consideration of consequences; and there is the method of a universalistic utilitarianism, for which the standard is the happiness of society or of all sentient beings.

On its negative side, it is the finding of this comparative study that no one of the methods, standing alone, justifies itself fully at the bar of public or common-sense opinion. Common sense holds in a general way that man has a duty to himself, and that he ought to consider his own best interests and happiness. On the other hand a too unqualified statement of this claim will arouse a moral protest; it is clearly the common judgment that a man's right to happiness has limits, and that it is his duty under certain circumstances to make a real sacrifice of his private pleasure to a higher good.

Again, it is the judgment of common sense that duty is often, perhaps most often, revealed directly to our gaze without the need for calculating consequences; we know at once that such things as lying and murder are wrong and ought to be avoided. At the same time an examination of these seemingly immediate and intuitive judgments will show that their authority falls a good deal short of being final. Acceptable as general rules, in their detailed application they are continually leaving the mind uncertain and perplexed; and when this happens the need is always felt for going behind their ultimateness and discovering general principles by which to resolve their obscurities and contradictions. And in such a case it is the principle of the general happiness on which the mind finds itself almost invariably falling back. Accordingly there is a large coincidence between the method of intuitionalism and the method which the Utilitarian recommends. Not only does the justification of the immediate dicta of everyday morality imply continually the principle of the general welfare, but Utilitarianism also, on its side, finds itself throughout

dependent, if it is to be a workable method, on material supplied to it by unreasoned claims of intuition. It is impracticable for the Utilitarian to wipe the slate clean and resort to his own independent calculations to determine what the effects of conduct on human happiness will be: what in practice he is forced to do is to accept, provisionally at least, the moral practice of his day, and apply his calculus only to this or that point in particular where he has special reason to suspect a discrepancy between the principles he himself follows and the common judgment. Indeed it is a question whether he can safely do even this except where minor changes are involved; good utilitarian reasons usually can be found against meddling with the more important rules of conduct to which men's lives and the institutions of society have become adjusted.

6. On the side, then, of an empirical examination, the outcome has been that none of the methods actually used to judge human conduct can be dispensed with, though Utilitarianism on the whole stands out as the most significant and far-reaching. Meanwhile along with this there also has emerged in Sidgwick's treatment a more positive conclusion. And here the emphasis tends to shift from Utilitarianism to a modified form of the rationalism which has appeared as a constantly recurring note in English ethics. In opposition alike to a strictly empirical hedonism, and to the theory of a moral sense, Sidgwick discovers the necessary foundation for the moral judgment in an immediate deliverance of reason. This rational intuition does not take the place of the methods already discussed; it is too general and abstract to be applied directly to the determination of duties in particular. But it is involved everywhere as a presupposition; and without it none of the three methods could be made to work.[19]

The first and simpler form of this rational deliverance

[19] *Methods of Ethics,* pp. 34*sq.*, 378*sq.* (3d ed.)

of consciousness is that which underlies the method of egoistic hedonism, where by the hedonists it has almost universally been overlooked. To become a principle capable of guidance, hedonism is compelled to say, not simply that pleasure is the end a man pursues, but that a man *ought* to pursue his own *greatest* pleasure. If we say this, however, we are going beyond a psychological statement of fact, and are introducing something equivalent to what Butler has called the principle of rational self-love. Even if it be granted that everyone makes pleasure his goal, it is not true that people always act in a way they anticipate will bring them the greatest happiness; under a variety of circumstances a man may be led to do things which he is perfectly conscious are not for his best interest in the end. The philosophical hedonist would be among the first to insist that such conduct is irrational. A greater future good has an authoritative claim to preference over a smaller present one; the whole basis of hedonism as a method is this persuasion that of two pleasures the greater ought to be preferred. But this is a rational premise, and not an empirical generalization, even though it may still remain true that the empirical fact of pleasure constitutes the essence of the good.

In a similar and still clearer way, Utilitarianism needs an immediate deliverance of reason before it can serve as a working method. It has already appeared more than once that the Utilitarians have a difficulty to contend with in the need of passing from the private pleasure of the individual, as the motive that in point of fact does move him, to the general happiness as the end that *ought* to move him. Sidgwick finds a partial solution in a further application of the foregoing principle of the practical reason. If my pleasure is a good, so equally is the pleasure of any other man. And since a more comprehensive pleasure is a greater good, I ought not to prefer my own lesser happiness to the greater happiness of others in case there is a conflict.

Hedonism and Utilitarianism thus both alike involve a rational basis, and reason or intuition appears as the ultimate foundation of the ethical judgment.

Meanwhile a further exercise of reason is demanded.[20] The two principles—of rational self-love and of the general welfare—do not in their outcome always coincide; and when a discrepancy occurs some rational method would seem desirable, either of subordinating one principle to the other, or of effecting a compromise. Common sense recognizes the difficulty here without fully solving it. Since the universal good is of necessity the greater in quantity, it has in general an authority over the principle of self-interest; so that we should expect to find, as we do find, popular morality approving a measure of self-sacrifice as an element in the moral life. On the other hand it tends to deplore the necessity for this and is very uncertain in detail about the extent to which it ought rationally to be carried.

The difficulty would be overcome if it were possible to show that the conflict is only in appearance, and that when the individual subordinates himself to the public good he is always going to work in a way that in the end will secure his own happiness also. And up to a point this claim can be made plausible. A man is in general better off when those about him are all prosperous and happy; and there are immediate personal pleasures that come from the exercise of sympathy and benevolence. But in the present world, at any rate, limits to this coincidence of human interests exist, and moral approval is often on the side of acts where an element of literal sacrifice is present for which no compensation offers. The only apparent way to rationalize the ethical judgment fully, and so avoid a fundamental contradiction in one chief department of our thought, would be to postulate another life where the balance is restored. But here we are leaving the field of ethics proper, and are resorting to what must always be an act of faith.

[20] *Ibid.*, Concluding Chapter.

CHAPTER XVI

METAPHYSICAL ETHICS: GERMANY

KANT · FICHTE

1. NOWHERE is it more difficult than in the case of Kant, and nowhere is it more necessary if an intelligible meaning is to be conveyed to anyone outside a few of the elect, to separate the fundamental human interest to which ethical theory is intended to give expression from the apparatus of metaphysical demonstration on which it is supposed by the philosopher to rest. Kant's metaphysical system ranks among the most subtle and the most portentous in the history of human thought. To lend itself to any brief account it will require to be simplified; while at the same time the risk is unavoidable that in an attempt at simplification the force of his reasoning will be lost. Still, this is not in every way a drawback. Kant has so powerful a mind that the less vigorous thinker who has once been drawn into the current of his dialectic is very apt to find it no easy matter to extricate himself; he is awed and baffled by the sheer weight of logic. About the only chance the average man has to escape from the clutches of Kantianism is by turning from his reasoning in detail to the initial plausibility of his assumptions. Accordingly we may begin by endeavoring to sift out the underlying premises from which the special nature of his ethical conclusions follows.

Kant's theory is built about one special aspect of the ethical experience—the notion of duty, or the "ought." This is relatively a modern notion. The Greek view of ethics had centered not about obligation, but about the

good. It set itself first to consider what constitutes the final end of human nature in terms of its concrete excellence or virtue; and having found this, the obligation to pursue it was for the most part taken for granted. In accepting the new emphasis which Christianity in particular had been the means of introducing into human thought, Kant proposes, not to take duty as a corollary of the good, but to make goodness itself a derivative of the primary claims of duty.[1]

The ground in experience for this reversal it is not difficult to see; and to get it clearly into view is perhaps the best preparation for understanding Kant. If the good were merely that which satisfies a man, or gives him happiness, we could convince him that a given course of conduct is immoral only by showing him that, in adopting it, he is really jeopardizing the interests for which he cares; and if he answers, I am the only one who knows what really I want most, and what you tell me that I ought to want is not my real desire at all, nothing remains to be said. But if such an answer is sufficient, and if a thing ceases to be wrong for me because I want it, morality seemingly has disappeared. The point of morality lies just here, that there are things which neither I nor any other rational creature *ought* to want. It tells me there is something good always and for everyone, whether or not a taste for it happens to exist. Accordingly if this is really so—and certainly it seems to correspond to a familiar aspect of the ethical experience—it follows that "natural" good cannot represent the final court of ethical appeal. Such good is subject to a higher tribunal; that in the ultimate sense is good—a case of *moral* good—only in so far as we can assert that it is morally *right*. And consequently it is impossible to define the good in its true ethical significance unless we have first determined what we ought to do; the law of duty is the

[1] *Cf. Critique of Practical Reason,* p. 154. (All page references are to the English translation of Kant's ethical writings by T. K. Abbott, 6th ed.)

original and fundamental concept, from which everything must spring.

This is the first thing to note in trying to get at Kant's intention; he starts from a genuine aspect of the moral experience, and one that has almost always to the more serious-minded moralist seemed its most impressive one. A corollary of this is equally important. Kant insists that his problem must be settled, not psychologically or genetically, but in terms of logic only. He proposes, that is, to take this claim on the part of a particular aspect of experience to exercise an absolute authority over the desires, and, assuming on the basis of the moral consciousness that the claim is justified—since without it what we feel to be the essence of morality would be lacking—to ask what are its necessary logical implications. For if the essential claim is accepted, and then from this consequences flow as a necessity of reason, nothing merely empirical or contingent ought to stand in the way of our accepting such conclusions. And this once more will mean that we must give up all idea of accounting for the authority of conscience on empirical grounds, and so in terms of man's natural constitution as a creature of impulse or desire. For it is the essence of the moral law that it is binding universally; and a universal law cannot possibly come from empirical sources. Experience may tell us that, up to date, a rule has generally held good, and so may be accepted as a useful guide; it is quite unable to inform us that anything *must always* be. A necessary and universal law, such as duty claims to be, can spring only from reason. If we start out, therefore, to look for the origin of morality in the facts of man's natural constitution we shall infallibly go astray; these may account for rules of prudence, but never for an authoritative "ought." [2]

2. The attitude that Kant here adopts is one that needs to be examined with particular care, since on it the force

[2] *Cf. Metaphysic of Morals,* pp. 4, 24-5, 43.

of his reasoning will in large measure be found to rest. We will assume that he is right in holding that duty comes to us in the first instance as something set over against desire, to which it claims to dictate. Such a fact, however, if it be a fact, is supposedly not incapable of an explanation on empirical grounds. Taken as an experience, there are two aspects here to be accounted for; there is the unqualified and peremptory form of immediacy which the sense of duty takes, and there is the fact that it presents itself as standing in opposition to our wishes rather than as a stronger wish. To this it should perhaps be added that the experience is bathed empirically in a glow of dignified emotion which usually, and very obviously in Kant's case, lends weight to the significance it is felt to have. But this last influence can under the circumstances hardly be counted a legitimate one; a theory which proposes to rest its case on pure reason has no right to call in the aid of an emotional prepossession.

When now the problem is thus reduced to its component parts, the chance of a possible solution without recourse to *a priori* elements is apparent. There is nothing against supposing that there may not exist some aspect of the human constitution, spontaneous and steady in its operation, which without conscious reasoning, and so with an appearance of immediacy, will act as a brake on the assertive wants and instincts, and which, while not itself a form of positive desire, cannot be ignored without risk to that permanent satisfaction which is the condition of human good. That Kant does not recognize this possibility is due not to any psychological difficulties it presents, but to the non-psychological assumption already noticed. Whatever the success of such a type of explanation in accounting for the empirical features of the sense of duty, there is one thing which it has to be admitted it would fail to do; it would not impart logical necessity, or strict universality, to the moral law. It would satisfy well enough the need for *practical* necessity. If the moral imperative

were the outcome of a permanent demand embedded in human nature—a negative requirement for attaining true satisfaction—it might very well be as unchanging as the human constitution which it served. But this is not enough for Kant. Kant insists that morality must be universal in the strictest sense, with the necessity that only logic can impart. Incidentally there is a pragmatic motive for this demand; Kant is not satisfied with the uncertain and fumbling efforts after human good which experimentalism presupposes, but wants a simpler and more decisive test of right.[3] But this consideration is a secondary one; what primarily lies behind his assurance is the metaphysical postulate that man is fundamentally a rational being, and that nothing will meet the demands of reason which falls short of a strictly universal law. It is on this account that the principles of morality can only derive from pure reason, and not from human nature; any given fact of human nature is a contingent fact which might conceivably have been different, and so cannot by any chance be the foundation of a universal law, or categorical imperative.

And of course it *is* self-evident that a law cannot in strictness be universal unless you have some ground, which experience does not supply, for saying that it *must* be what it is and nothing else. But it is not at all self-evident that this human demand for necessity and universality in our explanations of the world is itself also necessary. As a matter of fact most people in everything, and all people in most things, get along without it very comfortably; a sense of practical assurance stopping short of demonstration is enough for all essential needs. The philosopher may rejoin, "But it is not enough for *me;* knowledge then only is real knowledge when it is absolute, and I shall not be happy till I get real knowledge." But this has all the earmarks of a demand determined by the philosopher's peculiar temperament or empirical constitution, and a

[3] *Cf. ibid.,* 35-6.

demand which is not even universal among philosophers themselves, many of whom have reported that they do not feel it.

This postulate about knowledge has another aspect also which calls for a separate statement. The superiority of logical reason to empirical facts and generalizations Kant also translates into a similar superiority on the part of man as a reasoning to man as an experimental being.[4] It is not in the world of sense and feeling, but rather in the *a priori* life of reason, that the true self gets expression. Natural impulses, concrete actions, particular emotions, like sensuous perception and the tentative generalizations of empirical science, represent an inferior and essentially unreal form of the human spirit. Man's true destiny and good is to be found not in that part of him by virtue of which he belongs to the natural universe, but in a higher nature whose content is supplied by the necessary logical relationships in which the professional philosopher delights.

3. Whether or not those various premises are valid need not here be considered further; they have, however, to be kept in mind if we are to understand what Kant goes on to say. And the essential point can now be put in a comparatively simple form. If the good is not determined by natural wants, but is settled by a law of reason which is independent of the contingent facts of human nature, and capable of being recognized as valid in its own right by, and for, every being alike who pretends to rationality, how can we bring this highly abstract notion of duty to bear upon actual conduct, and translate it into the form of specific duties? To put the question clearly is to suggest the answer. If duty is to be determined *a priori* by a rational law freed from any foreign or contingent matter, it can be derived from nothing but the formal aspect of law *qua* law.

Put more intelligibly, what this means is that it can only be tested by its abstract self-consistency. Since a law of

[4] *Cf. Critique,* 180.

reason professes to be universal, if anything is to be our rational duty it must be of such a character that it can be acted on by all rational beings under all circumstances without resulting in inner contradiction. And this gives us, Kant thinks, without our having to appeal to experience at all, a perfectly definite and satisfactory way of deciding any claim on the part of an action to be moral; can it be turned into a universal law binding on all rational beings alike? Suppose I ask myself, to take Kant's favorite example, whether I am ever justified in breaking a promise. I should never be able by considering empirical consequences to assure myself that it might not on occasion be to my advantage to violate what I recognize as on the whole a useful rule. But if I were to put this question, Could I extend such a special dispensation so as to allow every man to break a promise whenever it seemed to be to his advantage? Could I be content that such a maxim should hold good as a universal law? I at once see that my position would be logically a suicidal one. If there were no guarantee that promises would be kept they would cease to be made, and the rule itself would lapse. Or take again the case of the man contemplating suicide as an escape from trouble; it is at once apparent that a system of nature of which it should be a law to destroy life through the very feeling of self-love whose special nature it is to impel to the improvement of life would contradict itself, and so would not exist as a system of nature. The first and fundamental principle of moral conduct is, accordingly: So act that you can also will that your action should become a universal law.[5]

And to this Kant adds a corollary, perhaps not quite so evident. In order to be moral, an act must be done solely from the one motive—duty for duty's sake; it loses its moral character in proportion as it is influenced by inclination, even though inclination points in the same direction

[5] *Metaphysic of Morals,* 16*sq.*, 38*sq.*; *Critique,* 114*sq.*

that duty points.[6] This is one of the places where Kant's theory runs some risk of arousing opposition from the common moral consciousness to which he started out by appealing. Is it really so, a man will very likely ask, that he who performs his duty as father or citizen merely because he recognizes it as a duty, and without being prompted by natural affection for his child or by benevolence toward his fellows, is morally a better man than the man whose warm and kindly impulses lead him spontaneously in the direction of right action? And the answer will probably for the majority of men be "no."

This, however, hardly is a fair way of putting the case. Kant does not say that a man is a better man for being without a spontaneous inclination toward the good, still less for doing his duty in the face of a contrary inclination. He is a more "moral" man; but that is not quite the same thing. For it has to be remembered here that, somewhat paradoxically in view of his eulogies of the moral law, duty is after all for Kant an "appearance"; it belongs to man only as he is a phenomenal being in the world of nature. Were it not for this phenomenal character that natural impulse bears, there would be no occasion for an imperative to override inclination: reason would have full and unobstructed sway. For God there exists no sense of duty. The same thing will be true of man in proportion to his likeness to God; and this must mean that an increasing coincidence between duty and inclination accompanies his spiritual growth. Such a coincidence, however, we may suppose Kant intends to say, is something we find happening but do not set up as a conscious aim; in so far as man continues to belong to the phenomenal world, and his will falls short of being a perfect holy will, morality, which points to the final superseding of phenomena by the real even though not itself ultimately real, remains for his

[6] *Metaphysic of Morals*, 5, 18*sq*.

human consciousness a higher and more constitutive aspect of his conduct than inclination, even good inclination.[7]

Within the limits of his meaning, Kant's position does not lack in force. As a matter of pure logic it does evidently follow that, if we distinguish moral good as obligatory from natural good as desired, an act can only then be termed a moral act in the distinctive sense in so far as it meets the definition of the moral, by arising from a sense of obligation. And this has a backing from the empirical judgment, to which there would be a pretty general assent, that no man is moral in the true sense apart from a Good Will; it is not enough that he should possess good impulses and act upon them, but he must act on *principle,* recognizing and assenting to the moral title of his deed. So likewise on the side of moral practice there is something to be said for the claim that we take a practical risk when we let our natural goodness of heart usurp the place of duty. If a man depends on benevolent feeling for his guidance he is trusting to something contingent, fleeting, unreliable; he never can be quite sure the proper feeling will be present, or present in the needed strength; and, in particular, he cannot be certain it will not be partial and one-sided, giving preference to favored objects over others. Even toward the moral law itself positive inclination, as Kant points out, has its snares for man's finite nature; it may be the source of a moral fanaticism which fails to take account of human limitations. Man being what he is, his only proper moral condition is *virtue,* that is, moral disposition militant and still obedient under orders, and not *holiness,* in the fancied possession of a perfect purity of the disposition of the will.[8]

4. The reference in the preceding paragraph to the danger of partiality attaching to the natural affections will serve to call attention, now, to a new aspect of Kant's principle, which finds embodiment in a second fundamental

[7] *Metaphysic of Morals,* 30-1, 58, 73; *Critique,* 175-7.
[8] *Critique,* 178.

formula. To act on a universal law will mean, in practice, that we give preference neither to ourselves nor to any other individual, but put all men alike on an equal footing. In the eyes of reason one rational being has the same rights as another, and the interests of none should be sacrificed. This Kant expresses in the maxim: Use every man as an end, and never as a means.[9] To get the full flavor of this, however, one will need to turn once more to metaphysics.

Kant had started from the certainty that the moral law lays its absolute command upon us. But in order that we should be able to accept this mandate at its own valuation, a further postulate is required. A command would not be truly rational unless we were in a position to obey it; and the possibility of acting on the law is, therefore, also implicit in the moral experience. In other words, the essential condition of morality is freedom.

Put summarily, Kant's reasoning is as follows: In his earlier *Critique* he had proved, as he thought, that the possibility of human experience rests on the presence within it of the organizing force of various thought categories or relationships, among which causality stands more or less preëminent. Nothing can become a part of experience except as it is bound by ties of necessary causal connection with the rest of the world of phenomena. In the universe of discourse which science represents, freedom is thus totally excluded. Nevertheless there is still a condition under which we might continue to think of man as free—in case, that is, he belongs also to another world, more real than the one with which science deals. For the laws of causality and of necessary determination only have their use in connecting phenomena; and to man as a noumenal being they would not apply. On this hypothesis we could, therefore, say *both* that man is determined and that he is free; and the two claims would not contradict because they would apply to man in entirely different senses. Man is determined as a

[9] *Metaphysic of Morals*, 47.

part of the world of unreal appearance; he is free as a member of a higher order to which the phenomenal world itself owes its whole existence. We cannot demonstrate this freedom, since reasoning involves the use of categories, and moves, therefore, only in that realm of sense experience which the categories organize. But we can without inconsistency conceive the possibility of freedom, and so refute those who would dogmatically deny it.

But when now we turn to the moral experience we can go a step further. For the analysis of duty has shown that the existence of man as a noumenal or fully real being—an existence which the *Critique of Pure Reason* had proved to be conceivable—must actually be accepted by us as a fact, since otherwise the moral law would be rendered void. We cannot realize concretely the nature of this noumenal self, for the imagination is tied strictly to experience. We cannot even be said to *know* it in the proper sense, because for Kant only what is demonstrable by logic deserves to be called knowledge. Nevertheless it is an irresistible postulate of what we may call the practical reason, in that, once grant the claims of the moral law, we cannot subscribe to the validity of these claims without accepting it. Practical reason, or the requirements of moral action, is thus a more fundamental thing even for knowledge than pure reason; it gives certainty to what else would be a mere speculative ideal.

We are now in a position to turn again to Kant's second maxim: So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end, and never only as a means. It is merely on the side of appearance, we have seen, that man is a link in the causal series; in his true self he is free, beyond the reach of constraint or exploitation, and subject to no laws save those which the autonomous will imposes on itself. And to attempt to use him as a means is not only to degrade him, therefore, but it is to degrade ourselves as well. We may

refuse to take man as he really is, and treat him as something he is not. But if we do this we are prostituting reason —which alone is an end in itself and the source of an absolute value—and are subordinating our dignity as rational beings to an acquiescence in the sensible and ignoble things that only seem to be. Most of all, we are being false to the moral law, and by refusing to extend to others that which in its very essence is a universal claim, are contradicting in practice what alone gives us our status as moral beings.

5. Without attempting to follow Kant's metaphysics further, it will be sufficient in conclusion to consider briefly to what extent the practical persuasiveness of his doctrine is really bound up with its metaphysical form. That man should regard his fellow man not as a means but as an end, and that he should claim no rights or privileges which he is not prepared to grant to everyone alike, may very well be a sound attitude on which to base a political philosophy. But as Spinoza had already shown, this may be given a naturalistic setting to most minds quite as convincing as that supplied by Kant. If the essence of man lies in the assertion of native powers and capacities, then freedom, or self-expression from within, will be his birthright, denied to him when he is made subservient to alien purposes. And in so far as he proves a being who can realize himself only in coöperation with his fellows, good arguments can be brought to show that freedom in the individual case can best be guaranteed when society is so arranged as to recognize the principle of freedom for everyone, and so the right of each man to be regarded as a final end and not as a means to the advantage of more privileged persons, or of an abstract entity called the state.

And in a similar way Kant's principle in its ultimate form may equally appear to have an empirical foundation. The demand that we be consistent in our actions strikes unquestionably a responsive chord in the breast of any man who

prides himself on being reasonable; but this stands in no need of an *a priori* explanation. Grant that man has a strain of reason in him, and we should expect to find him getting a satisfaction in exercising the propensity; and in this way a sentiment of rationality might develop capable of exerting motive power.

As a matter of fact Kant himself admits the existence of such a sentiment—the sentiment of respect for law, or for one's own rational integrity and dignity; [10] and he assigns to this specially privileged sentiment a useful part in overcoming the handicaps which the natural impulses place in the way of the moral motive. He denies, indeed, that it *constitutes* the moral motive; this he dismisses on the ground that we should have no such feeling of respect unless we had already first recognized the validity of the law as an objective fact. Its rational compulsion precedes its emotional appeal. He does not even grant that this interest in one's own self-respect, so that one cannot endure to live in a manner unworthy in his own eyes, ought to be identified with happiness. Its outcome is an inward peace that is merely negative as regards what can make life pleasant; its consolation comes not from a satisfaction of desire, but from a deep-lying consciousness of the rational authority of a certain universal ideal of personal dignity. And it is true that the feeling of self-respect would not arise were it not for some ingrained quality of human nature capable of responding to the claims of a rational self-integrity. But a similar thing can be said of *all* feelings; feeling always presupposes some inner grain of character, not itself affectional, which is the condition of experiencing satisfaction. Also it is true that when the inner urge is translated into consequences for the conscious life such as alone give it value and make it a motive for the will, these take the form of peace or contentment rather than of active delight. But the negative conditions of satisfaction—the

[10] *Critique,* Pt. I, Bk. I, Ch. iii; *cf.* pp. 213-4.

things whose absence would leave us *dis*satisfied—while they may for certain purposes be distinguished from more positive ingredients, are just as truly as these last a part of the ideal of happiness, if by happiness we mean the sort of life that meets fully and adequately the needs of our concrete nature.

It is difficult not to suppose that Kant has allowed himself to be influenced here by a verbal confusion—the confusion between a sentiment connected with reason, and a sentiment which is itself a form of reason.[11] The ground of his high regard for this particular feeling is obviously the fact that it is not for him just an ordinary feeling, but a "rational" sentiment. Whatever the company it keeps, however, a feeling is never anything but a feeling; and any derogatory remarks we are led to make about feeling in general apply to it as well. In any case an effort to avoid the conclusion that feeling must precede rather than follow the existence of respect for law as a moral motive serves to call attention to the debatable character of one of Kant's original premises—his assumption that it is not in man as we actually know him, engaged in the everyday business of his life, that we shall find permanent and satisfying values, but only in a mysterious self above the tide of time, abiding in a transcendent realm in which "experience" has no place. Once assume the existence of "absolute" worth in such a realm—and that there should be such a thing as absolute worth at all is for Kant only an assumption[12]—and we are bound to separate such absolute good from the experiential value that comes home to us in feeling. But the assertion is really meaningless except as it takes a meaning over from the ignobler life which it forswears. This is not the first time we have found philosophers exalting the particular form of good for which they have a predilection above the sorrier values of the common world, retaining for it the predicates of value while yet refusing to submit it

[11] *Cf. Critique,* 166.

[12] *Cf. Metaphysic of Morals,* 46.

to the same psychological scrutiny as that by which the pretensions of other claimants are demolished.

What Kant is doing is not very hard to see. He is taking the fact that all human values are in a way particular and relative, and so that the possibility of something better can always be conceived, and, rebelling against a recognition uncongenial to his moral feeling, is translating the chance of an indefinite increment of good into the existence of an absolute and perfect good. And since this last by definition cannot belong to a changing world, Kant has to postulate another world with altogether different properties, though he still retains the sentimental atmosphere, if not the intelligible sense, of terms like "good" and "rational" which have taken shape in the lower region of phenomena. Such a transcendentalism may be found appealing. But it will be for reasons that can never be rationally enforced on another man whose sense of reality and value fails to be satisfied except in terms of the actual human ends with which he comes in contact in experience.

The same tendency to overlook implicit value assumptions in the interest of an attempt at *a priori* deduction shows itself more concretely in the principle from which Kant derives duties in particular. The claim that moral duty lends itself to an impartial and universal application will seem plausible to most readers. But it does so not because we should otherwise be contradicting ourselves, but because we should contradict and make impossible of attainment a human good which we are not prepared to give up. Promises would no doubt be rendered nugatory if everyone was at liberty to break them when he pleased; but why should we not get along without promises? Obviously for the reason that without some measure of mutual confidence the natural life could not be lived in a way to bring the satisfaction human nature craves; set this underlying motive aside, and we could escape contradiction by the simple process of refusing to make promises at all.

6. When its elaborate scaffolding of metaphysics is removed, the practical philosophy of Kant has revealed itself as the expression of two fundamental ethical motives —the authority and austere dignity of the moral law as contrasted with particular desires and with private happiness, and a corresponding dignity to the being on whom morality lays its mandate, so that he appears not as a slavish object of compulsion, but as a free agent who accepts the law only because he sees it is worthy to command him. In Kant's successor and one-time disciple, Fichte, the same two motives are at work; but there is an interesting shift of emphasis. With Kant it is duty, the categorical imperative, that sets the tone of his entire discussion. In the case of Fichte, on the contrary, the thought of duty has become subordinated, alike in logic and in practice, to the more inspiring thought of freedom.

Before dealing with Fichte's ethics directly it will be necessary to start with a few words about his metaphysics. Technically this consists in the clearly impossible endeavor to show that the whole universe of reality can be deduced by the philosopher from the bare postulate that the abstract Ego asserts its own self-identity in the form of the proposition, I=I. In its more pretentious aspect as an exclusive dialectical method such a thesis can safely be neglected; though there is a meaning underlying it which can be given, though not quite unambiguously, an intelligible and possibly defensible statement. In general it rests upon the claim that the source and content of reality are to be looked for in Will rather than in Intellect. The universe is not in the final sense a deduction from reason. Once given standing ground, the intellect can, and ought to, deduce each succeeding step; but the fulcrum itself is a practical postulate and not a demonstrable truth. There is an empirical interpretation that can be given this which is not unfamiliar to philosophers at the present day. It might merely intend to say that belief in the existence of external

fact, whether in terms of a physical universe or of our fellow beings, arises from practical needs; we take them for granted in the first place because in no other manner can we give expression to those demands of action that constitute man's inner and essential nature.

To such an interpretation Fichte himself approaches closely in the more popular exposition of his philosophy.[13] He does not stop with this however. The world is not merely revealed to us through the needs of action, but is literally created by such needs; it *is* nothing more than the ego giving to itself an objectified expression. Fichte's meaning in this latter claim it is more difficult to put in unambiguous terms. In his earlier work it is not easily distinguishable from a subtle form of solipsism. Whatever its logical implications, however, in intention Fichte is not a solipsist, as a second and more distinctive way in which he puts the sense of his thesis plainly indicates.

A purely empirical theory of the part which action plays in our beliefs about the outer world will usually be found interpreting such activities in a naturalistic way; they are acts involved in the preservation and development of man as a concrete organism. Now the one thing Fichte repudiates unequivocally is naturalism. It is the *moral* will that for him furnishes the transcendental source of reality. The world is a postulate that springs from the demands of moral obligation; it is the way in which a self whose essence is freedom creates for itself the materials of duty—provides the objective field that is required before its abstract moral freedom can be actualized. But it is impossible to retain for the moral law that solemnity and grandeur which is its due if doubt is cast on its extra-human validity. The private self, accordingly, no longer even in appearance originates the world. The true nature of the universe now

[13] *Vocation of Man,* pp. 417-8. (References in the case of Fichte's popular writings are to the translation by Wm. Smith, Fichte's Popular Works, 4th ed., London, 1889.)

reveals itself as a free community of egos having each its being in an all-embracing objective unity of eternal moral relationships.[14]

7. With this as a background, we may turn to its ethical implications. Fichte is greatly concerned, as Kant had been before him, over the apparent contradiction between the necessity which rules the natural world—and this includes human conduct in so far as it is influenced by naturalistic motives—and the freedom which duty and morality seem to him to require; and he solves the contradiction essentially as Kant had done. It is true that in the phenomenal world with which science deals every event has its necessary cause. Despite this, however, man is free; he is free because the world of appearances is not the real world, but itself the product of the ego's free activity in a transcendental domain. As a natural being subject to impulse, man's actions fall within the rigid chain of causal law. But when he rises above inclination to a respect for the moral law itself, he passes into a new realm—the realm of freedom. This does not mean that moral conduct is independent of the impulses. All action takes place in the natural world, and presupposes the natural inclinations. The content of duty is set for us by the situation in which we find ourselves as natural beings. We must always act under circumstances which we cannot command directly, and which call for some particular kind of action; it is our duty to do that which arises from our station.[15] While Fichte professes to deduce the moral duties, it is not in the sense that philosophical deduction precedes conduct and creates its content; philosophy is, rather, a justification and clarification of something we must already know directly in experience. Nevertheless while this is so, we become rational beings, and therefore free in the true or moral

[14] *Cf. ibid.*, 419*sq.*, 453*sq.*

[15] *Vocation of Man*, 468; *Science of Ethics*, 158-60 (translation by A. E. Kroeger, New York, 1897).

acceptation, only in so far as we become aware of the ultimate ground of all action in the World Will, and so substitute for inclination the doing of duty for duty's sake—for example, when we seek sexual satisfaction solely as a means to a rational object, the propagation of the race.[16]

But freedom also has for Fichte another and less abstruse meaning; and it is this which in particular gives the new tone to his ethical conclusions as compared with those of Kant. Kant had attempted to derive the content of duty entirely from the abstract notion of universal law; and he had not been notably successful. In taking freedom as his criterion—freedom in something like the meaning it has for historical experience—Fichte has a measurably more concrete and fruitful principle to work with. More explicitly, he sets out to derive the moral duties from two premises, both of them also taken over from Kant—my obligation to respect my own dignity as a free being, and my obligation always so to act as not to violate the equal freedom of other men. Since, for example, I can act only through my body, I must preserve and cultivate the body as a tool for moral action. Rights of property, again, arise from the fact that property supplies a necessary condition for the exercise of concrete freedom; and consequently we are under obligation not only to respect the property rights of others, but to own property ourselves, to have a particular vocation, to exercise the prudential virtues such as thrift, and, in general, to live the life of a reputable citizen in society. In like manner of the sanctity, and even the duty, of marriage; purposely to remain unmarried is to incur guilt. Fichte indeed is able to show the absolute rationality not only of the marriage institution, but of the status of the German housewife, who, he argues ingeniously, enjoys the blessing of essential freedom in spite of, or rather because of, the fact that reason dictates she should devote herself solely to her husband, possess no

[16] *Science of Ethics,* 164, 340.

independent rights of property or of citizenship, and make no foolish attempts toward a career—for which her mind is not by nature suited—unless possibly it be as a writer on matters of feminine interest for readers of her own sex. The same consideration of freedom, applied now to our social relations, determines the duties of benevolence and justice; benevolence, for example, consists not in giving alms, except in cases of emergency, but in promoting a life of active self-expression through helping men to secure the benefits of education, of safe and continued employment, and the like.[17]

When, accordingly, Fichte urges duty for duty's sake as the only moral motive, it is in the light of freedom as itself an end that this is to be interpreted. What in the large such a principle means is that we should substitute for personal desire a higher good—the will to create a realm of freedom wherein the autonomy of every rational being shall, from a potentiality, become actual and existent. The entire course of history takes for him the form of a great drama whose plot is the gradual realization of such spiritual freedom. The human race starts as a natural phenomenon, engaged in satisfying natural wants. The first step toward morality takes place when the more aggressive few, following their inner will to self-assertion, enslave the many, and thus bring to consciousness the demand for freedom through the sense of its suppression. The third age—Fichte's own age—is marked by the revolt against these oppressive forces of society; it is the age of militant individualism, of rebellion against institutions and dogmas, in the interest of a freedom which, however, is as yet abstract and empty, being still unaware of its own full meaning. But already there is dawning a new age of reconstruction wherein, through the agency of a scholar class under the lead of the metaphysician, the true signifi-

[17] *Science of Ethics,* 226, 277, 284, 287, 308, 312; *Science of Rights,* Appendix I.

cance of self and freedom and reason are becoming realized. And the final epoch will reveal man's goal as an earthly being, with this new knowledge brought to bear in detail on the affairs of life, and the benefits of freedom extended to the entire race.[18]

Politically all this is best described by the term "liberalism." Fichte conceives of the future of man in vaguely socialistic terms, with the whole power of society directed to the education into full moral citizenship of every member of the state.[19] He does not, indeed, insist on the abolition of social classes; it is an open question whether democracy or aristocracy is to be regarded as the best form of government. But the point is unimportant, since it is the reality and not the form that counts; the only form of government totally illegal is one that proposes to maintain everything precisely as it is at present.[20] The one essential thing is that classes should not claim special privileges of their own, but that each should subordinate itself to the good of all, and receive only such rewards as are necessary that it may perform its task. For removing selfish class advantages Fichte does not look to revolution. The true method of reform is that of reason—the increase of knowledge through the efforts of the scholar, and its spread in circles able to receive it.

The necessary corollary is that the scholar should be left entirely free to follow wherever reason leads and to bring his results freely to the attention of the learned public unhindered by the authority of the state. Meanwhile—and here one finds the most engaging note in Fichte's political philosophy—genuine freedom does not exist save as the best is accepted voluntarily and is not forced on the recipient by some one higher up. A morally minded man can never think of bringing men to virtue by compulsory means. The state should in its own activities stand for

[18] *Characteristics of the Present Age.*
[19] *Cf. Vocation of Man,* 432*sq.* [20] *Ibid.,* 375.

what is highest. But it also must refrain from imagining that true morality can ever depend on anything save the individual's own choice and insight.[21]

8. For what is most characteristic in Fichte's ethics, however, it is necessary to turn back again from his political liberalism to the personal ideal of freedom which it is the business of the state to further. True freedom, we have seen, is freedom to obey the authority of the moral law, and not liberty to express one's instincts, to live the spontaneous and natural life, to experiment with happiness. Our given empirical nature is in point of fact the expression of a transcendental will, and so is enabled to supply the content of the free life of spirit. But it becomes a part of morality, and we cease thereby to be mere cogs in the machinery of a naturalistic universe, only in so far as we grow aware of its source in the moral will and substitute the rational character which this lends it as a motive to take the place of the original motive of desire. In moral conduct we do something which is put in our path to do by natural desire asserting itself under determinate conditions; but we are to do it not *because* it is an object of desire, but because reason demands it.

And since now objective reason takes the form of a community of free beings, each recognizing the full autonomy of all the rest, and each himself living in the full light of the moral law, this means, interpreted, that we are moral only when we act solely with the lofty conception of mankind and its destiny before our minds. There is but one virtue—to forget one's personality; the one vice is to make self the object of our thoughts.[22] At every moment of our lives we are to live thus in the light of eternity, allowing no motive to influence our conduct short of the very highest. Even the categorical imperative, accordingly, no longer stands supreme in its

[21] *Vocation of Man,* 470; *Science of Ethics,* 246, 329.
[22] *Characteristics,* 36; *Science of Ethics,* 276-7.

naked majesty as mere authoritative law; this is a stage, but not the last stage, in the ethical life. We are free in the fullest sense when we see the *meaning* of freedom; and this rational motive is not the mere form of universal law, but its content as a community of free persons each aiming solely to bring about the kingdom of God on earth, and careless of any private gain or satisfaction. The highest principle of ethics has thus become identified with the welfare of the moral community, where "moral" takes the form of loyalty to the one grand motive—a sense of the unutterable dignity and authority of this ideal of a free humanity which has its being as the expression of a single all-embracing Moral Law.

And one logical corollary of this perhaps deserves a word in addition. Since the basis of morality is knowledge, and since an essential quality of knowledge is certainty, Fichte is led to hold that the moral will, the ground of our choice of duty, is intuitive and infallible. It is not merely true that a man is moral only as he obeys his conscience; if he is a man of good will and rational open-mindedness, he cannot mistake his duty. Errors of conscience, so-called, are really nothing of the sort; they are perversions of conscience, which would have been impossible but for the intrusion of individual self-interest into the sphere in which universal and disinterested reason ought alone to rule.[23]

Meanwhile there is still a final step that remains to be taken. In his account of the moral goal Fichte has run up against a stumbling-block. The ideal statement of the goal takes the form of a requirement that I should realize in my own life that complete self-determination involved in the notion of an absolute creative Act to which the universe and all that it contains is due. But a human act can take place only in the empirical world; and as a part of this world it must, therefore, always be limited and incomplete.

[23] *Science of Ethics*, 183*sq.*

It follows that conscience cannot reveal to us an ultimate end nor put us in possession of a freedom entire and absolute; all it can do is to point out to us the next step we need to take. Within the empirical world, accordingly, we are led to the substitution of an eternal progress toward perfection for perfection itself; no step reaches the goal, but each moral act is a link in a series that forever approaches the goal. The true purpose of the existence of the race does not consist in *being* reasonable, but in *becoming* reasonable by its own freedom.[24]

But such an ideal does not fully satisfy Fichte. Even if progress were, indeed, a sufficient substitute for realization, the notion of eternal progress itself seems to fail us when it comes to be translated into the actual form of a philosophy of history. For the moment, we may rest satisfied with the thought of history as a movement toward a socialized society where reason takes the place of force, where the conditions of true living are extended to all men alike, and where peace and the spirit of brotherhood reign forever. But while this may partially content us so long as we are working toward it, what happens when the goal is once attained? To what end the last generation? [25]

And to ask this question is to lead us to the recognition that a merely social ideal after all falls short. No conceivable happiness under natural conditions can satisfy the free spirit of man. Reason is not for the sake of existence, but existence for the sake of reason; an existence which does not satisfy reason and solve all her questions cannot be the highest form of being.[26] And so in the end Fichte leaves ethics and morality behind. Alike the goal of history and the final destiny of the individual have their fruition in a mystical identification with the divine and perfect life. In the blessedness of this life of contempla-

[24] *Characteristics,* 147; *Science of Ethics,* 158.
[25] *Vocation of Man,* 437.
[26] *Vocation of Man,* 437.

tion a crown is added to the goal of social reform which alone can justify all our labors. Through it we enter the noumenal realm itself, and rise to the full satisfaction that can never be present to the life of action, confined as such a life must necessarily be to the empirical world, and so to an endless approximation.[27]

[27] *Cf. Vocation of Man,* 444*sq.*; *Characteristics,* 266, 273*sq.*

CHAPTER XVII

METAPHYSICAL ETHICS: GERMANY (*continued*)

HEGEL · SCHOPENHAUER

1. THE metaphysical method in ethics has its most effective illustration in the last of the greater German romanticists, Hegel. Nowhere is the repudiation of empiricism in all its forms more outspoken. For philosophies which propose to determine the nature of good and of duty from the mere fact of man's concrete nature, his desires and approvals and satisfactions, Hegel has the utmost contempt. The true way is to deduce what must follow from the inner dialectic of the Absolute Idea, and only then to bring the results to bear upon the details of experience. It is true the method issues in a very definite partisan conception of the ethical life, which has always competed with other ideals on the empirical plane, and which ordinary men may justify or criticize in terms of ordinary motives and satisfactions. But for Hegel, the philosopher is above all such petty disputes. He is in possession of a tool which is not subject to the fallibility of subjective reasoning, but which substitutes for individual persuasion the assurance of absolute and overindividual Reason.

In dealing with Hegel, therefore, the critic may, once more, adopt either of two attitudes. He may ask about the relative value of the outcome in view of its human appeal, or he may examine the metaphysical method by which the results have been attained. This last task, to be adequately performed, would require a prohibitive amount of space. But in any case its significance is for the metaphysician rather than the ethicist. For the latter, the chief

interest which it carries lies in the question whether such a method as Hegel's is in reality the one for which his own subject matter calls; and for this very general considerations may perhaps suffice.

Roughly speaking—and after premising that interpreters will probably never fully agree about his meaning—the fundamental character of Hegel's philosophy may be summed up in a combination of two main theses, which in previous philosophies had commonly stood in opposition. On the one side Hegel is a pronounced and vigorous rationalist; his method is, at least upon the surface, a purely conceptual one, which finds the essence of reality in the logical or relational structure that the mind discovers when it tries to think the true nature of the things that present themselves in experience. On the other hand Hegel endeavors to avoid the abstractness that usually has attended rationalisms, by insisting that these thought relations are not to be taken in their separate self-identity, but that they are real only in so far as they belong to a rational system, or a Whole. Reality is rational, and it is a system: the first thesis opposes itself to all philosophies of naturalism, or of psychological empiricism and idealism; the second opposes itself alike to the common rationalisms which stop with a number of particular intuitive truths, and to the pantheisms where system takes the form of a bare unity that has swallowed up and annulled all differences and distinctions. Difference *in* unity, the concrete universal, is our true tool for thinking the world. Whereas, accordingly, the lower rationalism of the Understanding tends to split the world up into *disjecta membra, either* this *or* that, and in consequence is always running up against contradictions, for the true method of Reason such an analysis only constitutes a starting-point. The existence of contradictions should be a challenge to the philosopher to look further, and to find some larger and more systematic concept within which each alike of the opposed truths may receive its setting and

its relative justification. And dialectic is this process through which, starting from the abstracter categories, thought makes its way progressively toward the truth, not by subjective guesses, but by following the inner clue of Reason itself, until at last we reach a comprehensive unity of thought in which all partial truths are summed up and find their ultimate significance.

2. An understanding of this standpoint and method in the particular field of ethics will be better attained if we discard the subtleties of Hegel's actual procedure and keep to certain outstanding features which are capable of receiving a relatively simple statement. And here it becomes important to call more express attention to one fundamental presupposition which is implied in the preceding statement, but which may be overlooked by reason of its pronounced logical or conceptualistic form. Reason, for Hegel, is not human or subjective reason, a process of thinking that goes on in this or that man's head. If we want to know what is true we are not to start, as Descartes had done for instance, from intuitions spun by the mind from its own substance; we must look outward to the world about us. Reality in a sense is given to us. It is the universe itself with its indubitable existence; and if we refuse to accept this for what it is, and try instead to construct reality by trusting to some inner sense of compulsion, we shall be subjecting the whole of things to the legislation of a particular and minor part—the private mind of an individual. To discover the real we must look abroad and see what reality actually is like. Hegel's ethical conclusions depend everywhere upon this fundamental premise.

At the same time—to return now to his method—we are to remember that reality is real not as a conglomerate of given facts, but only as an articulated logical system. Its mere presence in experience is our presupposition and our starting-point. But to *understand* it, or any part of it, we need to trace its inner rational structure, and follow out the

threads of logical relationship that bind it together into a single systematic whole. What this means more in detail can most easily be put in terms of its opposition to two tendencies current in Hegel's day. On the one hand he stands for the claim that the moral life is an affair of intelligence or reason, as against the disposition, common among the romanticists, to disparage reason in favor of an appeal to the sentiments, the feelings, the heart. This last, Hegel has at least some cause for thinking, is to reduce ethics to the ground of whim—of individual and momentary opinion or emotion—whereas it really claims an absolute validity and worth, and is discredited if the claim is not admitted. Kant, therefore, is fully justified, as against the subjectivists, in emphasizing the absolute and universal character of the moral law as a law of pure reason, with a categorical authority over the natural man. But Kant also is one-sided in that he leaves the ethical life abstract and void of content. Ethics is not an inner drama featuring the empty supremacy of conscience within the mind of man; it receives completeness only as it gets actual expression in a world wherein the conditions of ethical value are objectively and realistically embodied.

The dialectical groundwork for such a standpoint is found in the inner development of the idea of freedom. The essence of the life of spirit is that it should be a form of free self-expression, free self-realization; and Hegel undertakes to make clear what concretely an adequate analysis of this notion of freedom involves. In accordance with the demands of his dialectical method he proposes to start from the most abstract form of the concept, and to show how there develops, from within the idea itself, further special aspects of the ethical experience—to each of which a special and narrow philosophy of ethics has attached itself—until in the end we reach a single comprehensive concept where all these partial stages find their completion and true meaning.

Of the three main stages of the spiritual life which the dialectic discloses, the first is the field of legality, or of legal right, in its two main forms of property and of legal justice. Both of these have their rational foundation in the demands of the concept of freedom. The possession of property first objectifies the abstract ego and gives it a fulcrum in the real world; it is this fact that ownership is necessary in order to make possible the free activity of the self which is the real source of the right to property, and of its sacredness, rather than considerations of physical force, or social utility, or the other reasons that political philosophers have advanced. In the same relatively external fashion we may account for the rights of contract, where other selves now enter in, not yet as an essential part of the life of the ego, however, but indirectly through a common relationship to property.

Meanwhile in taking a particular form in the outer world in the shape of property, the universal freedom of the self is limited; and this limitation may come into conflict with the demands of its implicit universality. Here enters the sphere of wrong and of legal justice. Justice and the right of punishment are thus also founded on the inner and necessary logic of freedom, and not, as often has been held, on revenge, or on the needs of social safety. Instead of legal punishment being a restraint upon his freedom, which has to be justified, therefore, by outside considerations, the criminal has a *right* to punishment, since only thus is society treating him as a rational being, who recognizes the rights of others as implicit in the freedom he claims for himself. Punish him to reform him, on the contrary, or to frighten others, and you are treating him as an irresponsible tool. Put more abstractly, wrong, as a violation of freedom, is a nullity which itself needs to be nullified that freedom may stand.[1]

But while the field of legalism is thus a presupposition of

[1] *Philosophy of Right,* Pt. I; *Philosophy of Mind,* Sec. II, Sub-Sec. A.

the free spiritual life, such a presupposition is as yet implicit. Property gets its standing as a necessary condition of the free self; but the self is not yet conscious of its autonomy. It is a person in the legal sense, but it is not yet a "subject." Before the real life of spirit can come into existence, this implicit exercise of freedom must be turned back into man's own consciousness, and he must become aware of himself as the real source of law. It is in this phase of experience, where the drama centers about the supremacy of the inner conscience, to which Hegel confines the name "morality"; conscience is the sense of freedom on its inward side and taken in abstraction from the concrete forms of its expression. Here the emphasis, accordingly, is on an abstract loyalty to duty, on conscientiousness, on the personal virtues in terms of character, as such things stand opposed to legal authority, or utility, or any other form of outer sanction.[2]

It is in the third phase of the ethical experience that the distinctive character of Hegel's own philosophy comes to light. Inwardness is essential to the true life of spirit; but we cannot stop here. The abstract form of conscience—and this is the essence of his criticism of Kant—involves duty, but it does not supply the content of duties in particular; it leaves the ethical life a mere shell. This may have either of two consequences, both undesirable. It may lead to the impracticable moral rigorism of Kant himself; or, what is much worse, it leads to a moral sentimentalism and caprice. For in the absence of objectively established duties, in practice the decision is left to the subjective consciousness with all its capacity for going wrong through emotion, whim, or accident; it means turning over the direction of the spiritual life to each man to follow his own particular bent. The outcome has been the anarchism of modern life, with its exaggerated emphasis on the rights of the private conscience, its substitution of feeling for reason,

[2] *Philosophy of Right,* Pt. II; *Philosophy of Mind,* Sec. II, Sub-Sec. B.

the fatal spread of the notion of liberty as something that inheres in the individual man apart from social authority, and the weakening of moral bonds that flows from this. Such an inadequate conception of liberty Hegel would correct by a truer one. The fault lies here, as always, in abstractness. Liberty is taken as though it were a purely subjective matter of "free will," so that a man is free in so far as no restraint is put upon his self-assertion; from this standpoint things and persons are external to the will, and the individual enjoys freedom in so far as he can eliminate their influence and subordinate them to his own advantage. For Hegel, on the contrary, freedom consists not in bare autonomy, but in concrete self-realization, for which other things, so far from being a hindrance to overcome, are an absolutely necessary condition. Nature is not an alien and hostile fact, but a means of externalizing concrete possibilities of action. Growth in true freedom consists not in separating oneself from the world, but in finding oneself *in* the world. A man becomes free in proportion as he ceases to rebel against reality and wills instead to accept it, recognizing it as the complement of his private self, and substituting for a futile self-will the comfortable satisfaction of feeling himself, in his degree, a factor in a going concern, and an agent of impersonal forces and interests.

And this especially is true of other human beings, and of the institutions that constitute society, since no man lives truly except as he is a member of society and participates in its functions. There is, first, the family, which is not a mere device of nature to propagate the species, or an external contract which leaves each of the contracting parties unchanged essentially, but a new and concrete form of reality in which the individual merges his identity, and finds thereby that, far from losing his liberty, he for the first time has discovered his own true being as part of a larger whole. Then in the course of nature the family divides and brings new family units into existence; and this

opens further possibilities of human living. The family as such, since its rational basis is not as yet clearly comprehended but exists only in the affectional form of love, does not express the full reality of Spirit, and needs supplementing. It is true the next higher stage, where families join with one another for attaining the ends necessary to all alike—what Hegel calls Civil Society—seems to have lost something of inwardness and spiritual meaning, since each family now appears as an end in itself, with a relation to other families superinduced upon it merely for the sake of the external advantages of coöperation. But implicitly in this common need there lies a universal character.[3] And this now comes to consciousness in the State. For in the State, as distinct from Civil Society, Hegel finds not merely an external organization, existing for the sake of protection or of individual gain, and dependent on the force of rulers or the rights of the majority, but the full expression of the individual ego itself in its universal character, as opposed to the subjectivity and privacy of the inner life. The State is the true domain of freedom, the super-individual in which the life of spirit issues. It is an organism which does not exist for the sake of its members, but to which the particularity of these members is subordinated. In it supreme authority is vested, not by the consent of the governed, but by the Absolute Idea; it is the "march of God in the world." [4]

3. It is possible to take all this in a way that unquestionably conveys an important measure of truth. Nearly everyone nowadays would grant that man lives his completest and most satisfying life not as a noble savage, or as the self-sufficient product of an individualistic culture, but as a husband, a father, a citizen, a friend. Social organiza-

[3] *Philosophy of Right,* Pt. III, Sec. I, II; *Philosophy of Mind,* Sec. II, Sub-Sec. C.

[4] *Philosophy of Right,* Pt. III, Sec. III; *Philosophy of Mind,* Sec. II, Sub-Sec. C.

tion of some sort is not an unfortunate necessity, but a source of positive values. As against theories which deprecate the worth of community life in favor of a solitary existence, or theories—and these are much more common—which reduce the state to a purely competitive or business basis, and justify it as a mere device for enabling the individual citizen to make a larger amount of money or for protecting him in the enjoyment of the property he already has acquired, it is always worth while to call attention to the intimacy of the connection between a man's life and that of his fellows, and to the need of socialized forms to give this common life expression. So there is evident truth, again, in the claim that action, accomplishment, is better than mere vague aspiration, or than a negative purity of conscience; and for action we need to go outside the realm of subjective feeling and presuppose conditions of effectiveness in the shape of settled habits and opinions common to those with whom we have to coöperate. Indeed, just the fact that something has secured an actual standing in this organized social world may appear, as Hegel constantly is urging, to give it a claim on our respect as well as on our practical consideration; a purpose that has got itself realized, has faced conditions and overcome them, may reasonably seem to be more entitled to our admiration than a more pretentious ideal that is ineffectual, and that only exists in someone's head.

On the other hand there is an equally common form of human judgment with which this does not entirely agree. It is only the stupid, plodding, unimaginative man who is ever completely satisfied with what is, if he stops to compare it with what might be, but as yet is not. With all the flavor of unreality that attaches to the words "idealism" and "idealist," ideals have been too dominant in human history, have brought too many things to pass, to be got rid of with a gesture. If the ideal seems at times futile and thin, the real seems crass and trifling; and to

be overimpressed by it is a sign of unintelligence. Here is a contradiction which, as Hegel would say, needs to be sublated in a higher unity; in other words, the judgments need both of them to be reinterpreted and their limitations exposed.

The reconciliation implicit in Hegel's own treatment amounts in effect to this: Our attitude of condemnation toward the "real" is due to our taking reality in an inadequate way. When the real is particularized and removed from the larger context which gives it its significance, it does become unimportant. But such particularity is exactly what reality is *not;* the whole point of Hegel's thesis is that in their true meaning the real and the ideal cannot be kept apart. But the ideal thus conceived as the fuller truth which envelops and completes the particular fact is a very different thing from the ideal as somebody's guess or fancy or desire: and it is precisely because we have a feeling for reality that we are led to condemn the ideal in this latter sense.

The trouble with this reconciliation is that it misses the point of criticism; and it does this because it mixes up two different meanings of the word "reality." In the meaning just appealed to the term stands for the amount of conceptual content a thing possesses, the degree to which in defining it we find ourselves bringing in a reference to other things, the measure in which it sums up or implicates a larger conceptual system. But when Hegel appeals to the practical judgment that true ethical significance implies man's acceptance of accomplished fact as against subjective ideals, it is with a different notion of reality that he ought to be concerned. Here the real stands for that which has gained actual existence in the space and time world up to date; and such a *fait accompli* may be at almost any remove from, or in almost any sort of contradiction to, the logically complete Idea which is the goal of human history.

The discrepancy becomes still more apparent in the light of another possible mode of reconciliation between the real and the ideal. If the intelligent but unphilosophic man were asked why he approves an ethical attitude which does not stop with aspiration, but which seeks to subject ideals to the test of fact or of the possibility of actual attainment in a world already having a definite and stubborn structure—why, in short, he admires that sense for reality which distinguishes the practical man from the dreamer—his reply would probably take some such form as this: One ought to respect facts, he will say, not because facts are final or particularly admirable in themselves, but because only the realist can make headway in the world of action. An ideal with no possibility of attainment is of very small account; and if it is to be attained it will need to keep existing facts in view. A desire to know exactly what the fact is, then, and a respect for any genuine fact such as one must have for a worthy opponent to stand much chance against him, is an essential element in the temper even of a sound idealist. But this means that while anything existing here and now has a certain value, the value does not come from its mere existence. What really gets our approval is the acceptance and use of reality by man's will—an acceptance having final significance not in itself, but only as part of an active process through which reality is changed to make it more consistent with our wishes.

Realism and idealism are thus again reconciled, but with an entirely different emphasis—by connecting a true pragmatic realism, that is, with the judgment which vindicates the importance of ideals in human life, and deprecates piety toward accomplished fact. Such a reconciliation may agree, as against those who demand an unrestricted liberty of action, that real freedom will result only as new common or institutional forms take the place of the ones that need to be discarded. But it refuses to regard the world as so

narrow and confined that effective possibilities of present action exist only within the compass of such human habits as happen to have secured a place in the short period of man's past life on earth. The rights of the individual may be subject to the claims of social order; it does not follow that they are subject to any particular social order in which a man may find himself involved.

It appears, then, that there are two contrasting types of realism possible, both alike opposed to an idealism whose dreams of a better world lead it to despise the world that actually exists. Both recommend an acceptance of the actual. But the one says, Accept it by giving up your private sense of values, and by finding your freedom and satisfaction through an acquiescence in the World Spirit whose life has received expression in the constituted order. The other says, Test your ideals, indeed, by their capacity for being fulfilled in the actual world, which you thus must know impartially for what it is; but if you find that no necessary incompatibility exists, use this knowledge, not to school yourself to the acceptance of uncongenial facts, but to reshape the world into something nearer to what you, as an individual, feel to be a genuinely worth-while and satisfying good.

Put in another way, the peculiarity of Hegelism may be looked for in the nature of its attitude toward progress. It would of course be wrong to set Hegel down without qualification as a foe to progress. One whole side of his philosophy is in fact an elaborate carrying through of the idea of development; and if on another side reality is self-complete and timeless, morality, at any rate, belongs to the lower realm where development takes place. Granting, however, that for Hegel no present stage of history and no attained form of human institution is final, and so that a place is left for an ideal of growth, it still remains to be determined just what this amounts to in its human bearing.

The gist of the problem, for the practice of ethics, may

be put as follows: It has appeared that the essence of the life of spirit takes the form of a self-realization which consists in overcoming the opposition that at first seems to show itself between the inner experience and the outer world, and in finding our freedom by means of, rather than in spite of, the duties which this world imposes on us. At the same time it has been not only admitted, but insisted, that at no stage of human history does the possibility of a complete self-realization obtain. Nothing in the world of space and time can fully express the eternal Idea; beyond any given step another remains always to be taken. But how does this discrepancy between the claims of reason as it is already embodied in the world, and the requirements of historical progress, affect the duty of the individual? How is the demand that the individual shall find his good through an identification with his objective surroundings, and not attempt to be wiser than his day and generation, to take its place in a world ever moving toward the rational ideal? This is a question which ethics cannot leave without a definite answer, since it involves the whole practical attitude a man is called on to adopt toward the claims of progress on the one hand, and of the *status quo* on the other.

4. The nearest answer to the question, which involves the fewest difficulties for Hegel's own teaching, is one that as a matter of fact he seems to put forward as his own. Progress is necessary. While the goodness of a given individual depends on the completeness of his identification with his own age and community, such present attainment is bound to be superseded by a higher stage, which makes possible for his successor a closer approach to the Idea. But the responsibility for this new step in attainment belongs not to the man himself, but to the World Spirit which lives and has its being in universal history, and which is the phenomenal representative of the all-embracing and unchanging Absolute.

So understood, Hegel's attitude becomes reasonably consistent. Whatever the future may bring about, man's present duty is primarily one of acquiescence and of piety. And there is a side on which this has an ethical appeal. Some measure of faith in a power that makes for righteousness is a useful ingredient in the spiritual life. Since hitherto man's conscious and intelligent direction of his own fate has been inconspicuous, the natural logic of a refusal to see in unconscious social forces any relevance to human welfare is an attitude of universal fault-finding, which sets down civilization as a failure to be wiped out and supplanted by contrivances of man's own creation—an attitude not unfamiliar as an extreme type of radicalism and reformism. But aside from the blindness this shows to a number of valuable things that civilization has secured to man, and a not altogether pleasant tone of peevishness and self-righteousness which it fosters, it likewise casts doubt upon the feasibility of its own program. In view of man's impotence up to date, and the obvious magnitude of the powers arrayed against him, the logical outcome is not the passion for reform, but either a Stoic retreat into the recesses of one's own moral nature, or else a moral nihilism which finds its satisfaction in its own sophistication and its ability to see through the pretenses of the cosmos.

While, however, this may all be true, it is easily possible to go too far in the opposite direction. Modesty, obedience, submission to discipline, a readiness to find wisdom implicit in something more massive than one's private opinions and preferences, are desirable traits up to a point. But so also are self-reliant initiative, the courage to follow one's instincts even though this may mean rebelling against accepted standards, the mood of righteous indignation when vested interests interfere with the claims of a more personal good. And with none of these last does Hegel show the slightest sympathy.

Meanwhile one ought not to overlook certain things in

Hegel which might be used to qualify this interpretation of his meaning. In theory he does insist in a sense on the importance of the individual in the social scheme; the World Spirit is nothing save as it takes the form of conscious intelligence, and it seems most likely that for Hegel such a consciousness is actual only in the form of persons. But this would not modify the previous conclusion if the true rôle of the private consciousness is only to realize the meaning of the universal process, and not to be an active agent in bringing it about.

There are other suggestions, however, of a more active rôle that might conceivably be assigned to private persons. One of these takes the form of the "great man" theory.[5] The great man furnishes, at any rate, the tool which the spirit of history uses in order to effect transitions to a higher stage; and it might seem hardly to Hegel's interest to insist that the activity of the highest instrument of reason goes on without the crowning gift of self-awareness. But on the other hand are to be set, again, explicit statements to the effect that states, peoples, and individuals are all unconscious tools and organs of the World Spirit.[6] In any case, the great man theory points conspicuously to the romantic strain implicit in Hegel's whole philosophy, with its disposition to think solely in terms of the high lights of history and its lack of interest in the more homely considerations on which the modern science of history depends, and from which the hero-worshiper is disposed to turn his eyes.

Finally there is one other way in which the agency of man might be vindicated. The philosopher, at any rate, to whom the inner dialectic of reason has been laid open, might seem to be in a position to make this count for something. Here also Hegel's position is ambiguous. In general terms he denies explicitly the right of philosophy to

[5] *Cf. Philosophy of Right,* Pt. III, Sec. III, § 318.
[6] *Cf. ibid.,* § 344.

legislate; its business is to understand reality, not to change it.[7] At the same time it is possible to interpret this in a way that still would leave open a considerable territory where man's reason would have a significance for history in the making; and such a compromise Hegel apparently adopts. The thing he is directly concerned to deny is the right of private *caprice*—of personal idiosyncracies of temperament, random desires and preferences, and the shallow everyday thinking that takes these for its premises—to assume an attitude of petulance and rebellion against the reason implicit in the historic process. True reason, however, which takes the historic fact as its starting-point, and endeavors to follow the leading of impartial and objective truth, stands on a different footing; and this might reasonably be assigned some practical significance in cases where the judgment of history has not yet been unambiguously pronounced. For example there might seem to be an important practical difference—though to draw the line would not be an easy task—between a conservatism which accepts the fundamental principle of the monogamous family as an established product of the wisdom of the ages, and then uses the principle to decide whether this or that particular aspect of family life is rational, and a radical criticism which should attempt, in the interest of individual freedom, to root up the entire institution of the family and turn the course of development sharply in an opposite direction, solely on the authority of the rational pretensions of a group of advanced thinkers.

5. Within limits such a regulative use of the "essence" or central meaning of the products of historical experience has a well-established standing. In the tangle of events and laws and forces which crude reality presses upon our notice, it would be entirely impracticable to detect any unity of meaning without the assistance of a guiding clew. This each man will find in the aspect of things which

[7] *Ibid.*, Preface.

strikes him as most significant; and he then will try to bring other things within the range of its inner logic. And Hegel's particular clew—the notion of human freedom concretely realized under conditions which do not confine it to an abstract sense of duty or to a vague subjective yearning—undoubtedly stands for something of large importance for human culture; and it therefore ought to provide a useful touchstone for estimating critically the worth of this or that tendency in life and history. But its value is in the first place not dependent on its having been deduced by an infallible dialectic process which places the philosopher who follows it beyond the reach of subjectivism in his thinking; [8] this is a pretension that can only delude him and render him ridiculous. No one now believes that the long string of links in Hegel's *Logic,* with their obscurities, evasions, and selective arbitrariness, is identical with cosmic Reason, so that all other philosophers must follow at their peril. The real basis of whatever authority the ideal of freedom may possess is not logic, which after all is one of the most fallible of guides, but satisfactoriness to experience or life; it is the fact that human beings empirically are of such a nature that they find their permanent good realizable only in terms of free activity under the objective conditions that give to this effectiveness. The categories of the physical sciences have no such connection with the needs of life; that is one reason why Hegel's deduction of Nature leaves the present-day thinker cold. But in the world of spirit freedom does supply a motive which, if not inclusive, at least is relatively central; and it affords, in consequence, a clew to the understanding of human history of real and lasting value.

In proposing to shift the base of its authority, however, from its felt satisfactoriness to its logical parentage, Hegel is taking a heavy risk. While logical simplification may often be a heuristic necessity, it is far from being final or

[8] *Cf. ibid.,* Introd., § 31.

decisive. For logic to work it must first choose a starting-point, which is an extra-logical act; and since for any finite mind this starting-point always represents a partial and more or less arbitrarily selected aspect of the whole, the more logical we are, the more we are certain to overlook other elements that a complex world involves. Nor, again, do the facts ever justify the philosopher's faith that the deductive process itself is a product only of pure and dehumanized logic influenced by nothing but its own abstract subject matter. It is impossible but that at every step alternative constructions should be open, which the pretense to logical rigor obscures but does not altogether hide; and then the logically more or less irrelevant sense of values which the dialectic method pretends to avoid inevitably will take a hand.

The best proof of this is Hegel's actual procedure and results. The importance of a philosophy for ethics lies in the justification it attempts to give to certain forms of ethical institution and of moral practice as against other and competing forms; if it did not do this it would fail in the one thing that makes ethics practically significant. Now Hegel's philosophy does claim to justify conclusions of a very specific sort: for example, that the punishment of death is necessarily due to murder; that a man ought to marry, but not primarily for love, and that woman finds in marriage her one true vocation; that primogeniture is rational; that the state should require every individual to identify himself with some religious organization; that a professional army is a necessity of reason; that the only form of government approved by reason is an hereditary constitutional monarchy. All these things, it is to be remembered, are not proven by an appeal to the practical advantages they offer, or to the human happiness they serve; such arguments are a sign of shallow thinking and an ignorance of true philosophy.[9] They are necessary

[9] *Cf. ibid.*, Pt. III, Sec. III, § 281.

deductions, rather, from the inner movement of Absolute Reason itself. For example, relatives ought not to marry —and this applies also to familiar acquaintances—because it is contrary to the primacy of the marital concept; what is already united cannot be first of all united by marriage. The State, again, is an organism which expresses a single will; and since self-consciousness or will are realized only in the individual, it follows inevitably that a concrete individual must exist, in the form of the Monarch, to embody the central will of the State.[10] That the individual monarch may be simply a figurehead—one who puts the dot upon the "i"—and that his will needs the imprimatur of a council to become the real will of the State, arouses in Hegel's mind no question about the demonstrative character of his deduction.

Such subtle reasoning, here and elsewhere, is interesting and ingenious. But it is not the reason of the Universe, of which Hegel is the authoritative mouthpiece. And it reveals, moreover, the real ground of Hegel's assurance. No one can examine the concrete outcome of Hegel's social and political philosophy without becoming aware that the pronouncements of the World Reason bear a striking resemblance to the forms of the Prussian State in Hegel's own day. The criterion of truth and duty turns out to be in actual practice not merely the *status quo,* but the *status quo* as embodied in one particular political community almost alone among the multiform products of history. Somehow reason finds itself always justifying the German constitution; though of course the fact that Hegel himself happened to be a Prussian can for him have nothing to do with this.

And the suspicion of a bias here is reënforced by a consideration of the central principle which the application of the rational test involves. The chief criterion for settling which among competing theories and institutions pure rea-

[10] *Ibid.,* §§ 278-9.

son backs, is their attitude toward individualism. If they stress the rights and claims of the individual as against the community and the state, then they are the product of shallow and subjective thinking; if, instead, they demand the subordination of the individual, and his acquiescence in things as they are, they are the outcome of necessary reason. In the end, accordingly, the original conclusion reëmerges without much qualification. The individual's use of reason is not to find ways of bettering existence, but to reënforce his obligation to accept it; though equally it justifies his accepting a new status when once this has come about without his own assistance.

6. A question might be raised about the justice of placing Schopenhauer, as an ethical philosopher, among the transcendentalists. He claims to be empiricist; and it is true that he appeals to immediate facts of experience more aggressively than his predecessors. Still it is to metaphysics that he turns to explain and justify his facts; and when he does this it soon grows evident that his metaphysical background cannot evade responsibility for helping in the first instance to shape the facts themselves.

The purely ethical part of Schopenhauer's philosophy is unusually simple and uncomplicated. He starts with the assumption, which he takes to be self-evident, that the natural man aims only at his own pleasure, or the satisfaction of his private will. On the other hand we find morality urging him to sacrifice his will, and to substitute for his own good the welfare of his fellows; for it is a patent fact that the course of virtue runs entirely counter to that of happiness.[11] What is the ground of this demand?

Schopenhauer criticizes, as attempts to meet this question, both the moral imperative of Kant and the more familiar notion of morality as a backstair method of gratifying our own desires; and he finds the true solution in the

[11] *Basis of Morality,* p. 24. (References are to the English translation by A. B. Bullock, London, 1903.)

fact of *sympathy,* by which he means not sympathy in the broader sense of Adam Smith, but a fellow feeling with suffering, or pity. In sympathy, he appeals to experience to show, we have an actual and undoubted tendency in man which does not aim at private satisfaction, and from which it is only very incidentally that satisfaction follows. Sympathy and self-sacrifice are painful, not pleasurable. Moreover, sympathy or compassion is the *only* thing discoverable that thus takes a man out of himself and identifies him with the good of others. Enlightened self-interest may lead him to do things which aid his fellows; but so long as he is thinking of himself, he is never judged a genuinely moral man. The same conclusion follows from an analysis of the virtues. The two root virtues are justice and lovingkindness, to which all the rest in so far as they are really virtuous can be reduced; for, Schopenhauer argues, it is meaningless to speak of a man's duty to himself, while duty to God is only another name for a hidden self-interest. Now the foundation of justice—the first and original cardinal virtue—is a sympathy for suffering, which holds us back from inflicting injury on others; it is summed up in the precept: Do harm to no one. Lovingkindness adds to this the further precept: But rather help all people so far as lies in your power. But here, too, a pity for suffering is fundamental; we have, Schopenhauer thinks, no sympathy for the joys of others except as we have previously sorrowed over their pain and feel relief at its annulment.[12]

So much for the facts; next for the explanation. *Why,* the question arises, should a man thus identify himself with the woes of another man? How does it happen that his natural interest in his own ends and feelings should attain disinterestedness? Only one possible reason is discoverable for this; and the reason is supplied by Schopenhauer's philosophy.

7. The metaphysics of Schopenhauer has two leading

[12] *Ibid.,* 35, 38, 54, 168, 172-3.

aspects. Its foundation is the doctrine that the essence of reality is Will—a blind, outgoing force of self-assertion which in the world of science reveals itself as the eternally active Energy that underlies the physical universe. Mind, or intellect, is only a secondary tool and product; and therefore the outer world, which as Kant had shown is mind-created, is also secondary—an unreal objectification of the blindly striving Will. And from this there also follows a fundamental consequence for human life—the recognition of the essential evil of existence. Because life is striving, or desire, it is also want and pain; it is this essentially, since it is the nature of will that it can have no real end and enjoy no lasting satisfaction.

It is this doctrine of pessimism, in particular, which starts the suspicion that Schopenhauer's empiricism is more apparent than real, and that it has been all along his metaphysics of the will, rather than the unvarnished facts, that has been responsible for his views about morality. The thesis that only pain is positive, while pleasure is negative and nothing but relief from pain, is a conclusion he is in need of for the interpretation of life he is set on establishing. But it is a conclusion directly contrary to the testimony of experience; and to establish it, accordingly, Schopenhauer depends not on facts, but on a deduction from an arbitrary reading of the nature of desire. Since pleasure is dependent on the presence of desire, and since unsatisfied desire is painful, pleasure *can* be nothing but a momentary pause of relief between one pain ended and a new succession of desires or wants.

Whether Schopenhauer's attention was similarly turned to sympathy by reason of its usefulness for his metaphysics it is not necessary to decide; at any rate it is here he finds the explanation of sympathy he is looking for. The problem, to repeat, is this: How can a man identify his own interests with those of another man? And the answer is: Because the apparent separation is illusory, and the suffer-

ing of another *is* in reality his own. For if the world that knowledge gives us, split up as it seems to be into a multitude of individuals each self-complete, is an appearance only, and the sole reality is the one underlying Will, the identity of each man with every other man is the literal truth. And in sympathy we have the vague sensing of this fundamental fact as for a moment it pierces the veil of unreality which the intellect has woven; just as conscience, with its pangs of remorse, is an intuition of the truth that, through my identity with my victim, I am, in injuring him, inflicting equal damage on myself.

Morality, then, stands for conduct growing out of the insight—an insight mediated to the natural man through the non-natural feeling of sympathy or compassion—that all life is ultimately one; while wrong or wickedness is conduct which follows the lead of the intellect in breaking up the unitary Will into the specious forms of individuals in time and space, and so separates me from my fellow beings. But morality, in the form of sympathy, is not the final word; and for its more ultimate significance we need to turn now to a new consideration.

This is the Buddhist notion of the true end of man as non-existence, or, in Schopenhauer's phraseology, as a denial of the will to live. Since the inevitable outcome of life is suffering, since the Will can in the nature of things never reach an end or attain satisfaction, man's sole hope lies in utter extinction. This does not mean physical death. The body is a phenomenon and disappears only to take on some new form; peace and rest can only come as the striving of the Will itself is stilled, and thereby the whole world of appearance undermined.

In the light of this goal, however, morality, while a real value, sinks to a subordinate and relatively insignificant place. It is a foretaste of true beatitude and a step in its direction; it brings a momentary glimpse of the unreality of the individuating principle on which the personal life

depends. But the one really effective source of salvation lies in the intellect, and not in feeling. Purely as metaphysics, there is a gap here which Schopenhauer fails to bridge. Logically it would seem that reason, as the unreal creature of the Will, must be wholly impotent to tame its master and creator; appearance cannot change reality. But if we overlook this ultimate difficulty there is a practical sense which Schopenhauer's doctrine carries that has a possibility of emotional significance. The intellect, originating in the service of man's self-assertive impulses to help him attain the things he craves, may as a matter of experience become disinterested; it may take the form of a desire just to know what reality is like, irrespective of its pragmatic uses. And if the goal of a disinterested search for truth turns out to be a recognition of the futility of life, the inevitability of pain and sorrow, the illusoriness of all earthly things, and the ultimate identity of every finite being, then such a perception might be expected in practice to check our vain cravings, and lead us to seek peace in the total extinction of desire. And it is in such a conception of the intellect as putting a quietus on the will, and leading to its final extinction in Nirvana, that Schopenhauer's ethical philosophy issues.

8. In setting forth this issue, Schopenhauer appeals to the mystics of all ages. A more discriminating treatment would have left his logic more consistent. All true mystics start from a disillusionment with natural existence, a perception of the barrenness and bitterness of the earthly life in which human desires strive vainly for fulfilment. But this may have two different backgrounds. For the greater and more typical mystics in Christian times, the real source of disillusionment is not the loss of savor, merely, that comes from satiety and boredom, but the persuasion of higher and more genuine values somewhere in existence, to which earthly aims and pleasures are unequal. It is a positive assurance of reality and goodness, rather than the

poverty of more familiar claimants to the title of the good, that fills their minds; and their aim is, in consequence, to leave behind all partial good and lose themselves and all their finite claims to satisfaction in the one ineffable and blessed Source.

To mysticism in this sense Schopenhauer is a stranger, both emotionally and intellectually. On the contrary, it is the entire absence of value anywhere that he insists upon; instead of absorption in a divine whole, salvation is only to be won by the complete annihilation of the very source of being. What the two attitudes have in common is the worthlessness of the phenomenal life; from there on they turn in opposite directions. The emotional ecstasy of mysticism is replaced, in Schopenhauer, by the despair which comes from seeing things as they are; the only emotional significance that remains is the satisfaction of an intellectual pride in one's own sophistication. In both cases the goal is something above the intellect and its unreal distinctions. But for the one type of mystic it is found, actually if not in so many words, in the glorifying and deifying of absolute truth or reason, which retains all its values while losing only its defects; whereas for Schopenhauer mind commits suicide, leaving nothingness behind.

It is worth while, probably, in view of the tendency of rationalisms to overlook the presence in the world of positive evils through an absorption in the comforting intuition of absolute truth, that there should be from time to time an equally abstract insistence on the darker and seamier side of things. Life loses much of its significance when the note of happiness is struck too persistently. But to see *nothing* but evil likewise implies a mental blindness. Indeed a philosophy of salvation based on this, and this alone, is endangering its own logical foundation. Apart from *some* standard of goodness, pain becomes simply a fact of natural history, neither to be justified nor deplored; and therewith it loses all the sentimental value on which depends the rôle it plays in

Schopenhauer's world drama. The mystic finds such a value in true Being, through which a secondary sort of reality filters down to the world of appearances in which evil has its place; but nothingness can never give a standard of comparison.

No doubt there is an emotional impressiveness in a divine pity for the human lot based on a sense of the hopelessness of positive good. But this becomes possible only if we take the empirical feeling of pity at something like its face value, as pointing to the loss of a good that might conceivably have been. And, in particular, a sympathy which in the end is nothing but *self*-pity, and which gets its importance for the phenomenal self merely from the fact that it constitutes a step in the process of escaping pain, has in reality been turned into what is as truly a form of inverted hedonism as the popular notion of salvation. As a matter of fact, in spite of his intellectual exploitation of human suffering, there is in Schopenhauer singularly little of the spirit of true self-effacing pity. The tragedy of the world is for him a histrionic tragedy, and pessimism is constantly passing over into a superficial cynicism.

It is in his minor *Essays* that this last tendency is to be discovered most clearly. Here we find very little of the claims of compassion as a source of concrete rules of living; indeed we find little of any systematic attempt to suppress the will to live, such as appears in the asceticism of the Eastern sages whom professedly Schopenhauer follows. Schopenhauer is in his own person no ascetic; he represents a wholly different practical ideal. What the *Essays* show us is the effort of a not very robust nature to protect itself against the ills that man is heir to, by reducing as far as possible its points of contact with the world. While still clinging to the ultimate hope of making life as pleasant as possible, it seeks this goal in the diminution of pain rather than in the positive quest for pleasure; it abandons the possible satisfactions of the active life because of their

attendant risks, and schools itself to expect nothing so that it may not suffer disappointment. As such it is Stoicism of a sort, but with the heroic flavor missing; it is Stoicism as interpreted by a vain and thin-skinned man without much human kindliness, who is conscious of great inner gifts which the world passes by while it bestows adulation on his rivals, and who takes revenge by retiring into himself, seeking a refuge in the solitary pleasures of literature and art, indulging in the disparagement of a society which does not appreciate men of intellect and genius, and exalting a systematic regimen to preserve this aloofness into life's deepest wisdom.

The result is interesting, but not specially important. Schopenhauer is effective in pointing out the many futilities that enter into human aims, more especially the artificial aims and pleasures of society in the narrow sense. But the ideal which he recommends is as far from a mystical denial of the will to live as it is from the ideal of a truly satisfying workaday life. And in particular his ideal takes its hue from the great tragedy which always threatens, and from which Schopenhauer finds no method of escape—the tragedy of boredom. To the man who has in all sincerity given up the will to happiness several roads are open. He may, if he feels actually the sympathy for suffering which Schopenhauer feels in theory, abandon the hope of personal happiness in the service of relieving human pain. He may endeavor as a true ascetic honestly to root out all desire. He may court self-destruction, from which he will not be deterred by fine-spun metaphysical arguments. But he will never set out consciously to perfect a mode of living which is neither sweetened by pleasure nor graced by any intrinsic nobility, and which ends by turning a conscious effort at avoiding pain into a losing fight to escape from being bored.

CHAPTER XVIII

METAPHYSICAL ETHICS: ENGLAND

BRADLEY · GREEN

1. WITH the death of Hegel the period of great speculative activity in ethics on the Continent comes to a close; and for the later career of ethical philosophy in its fertile and widely influential aspects we have now to return to England. Before resuming, however, an account of the typically English tradition which connects itself with the Utilitarian movement already described, a new and competing form of theory merits attention. Idealism, or Absolutism, which in the latter part of the nineteenth century tended to dominate academic philosophy in Great Britain, is in its large outlines an importation from Germany; and a good deal that has just been said, of Hegel in particular, will serve to characterize its ethical bearings. Nevertheless it is sufficiently modified by the more sober English type of mind to require consideration by itself; and, in particular, some new light is shed upon it by the highly controversial relation in which it stands to the empirical doctrine of utility that already held the field.

Minus its metaphysical underpinning, British Idealism rests on a fact of experience, or a group of facts, which is both true and important. In the first place, all human conduct is the expression or realization of a *self,* having a relatively permanent character out of which actions must spring, and upon which their consequences must react, before they have any moral significance. In the second place, a close community exists between this self and the world of things and persons which its actions presuppose.

There is an obvious sense in which I am to be regarded not as exclusive of other selves, but as realizing my own nature only as I am supplemented by them and completed; my true self is not denied, but is first made possible, by the fact that I am a husband, a father, a citizen, a friend. And I may say, accordingly, that moral growth consists in a progressive realization of the significance for my own being of what at first comes to me as something external, and in a progressive endeavor to bring this within the precincts of the self.

If we begin to examine this, however, and, in particular, if we try to convert it into metaphysical terms, it is not certain its meaning will be found to be unambiguous; and the easiest way to get the actual meaning it has for the English Idealist is to contrast it with the position which he thought the Utilitarians held, or ought to hold. The central point of his criticism of the utility philosophy may be located by contrasting two rival doctrines of the self. To the Utilitarian the self meant a string of concrete experiences or feelings that could be pinned down and particularized as such and such a feeling of such and such a degree of felt goodness or pleasantness. It was just this particularity on which he depended to provide a test between opposing claims to moral value. Being thus reducible to specific and concrete facts in the universe, each self was, of course, as an existence, distinct from every other self. This exclusiveness of existence furnished a problem to the Utilitarian philosopher when he got around to an attempt to understand and justify man's social relationships. But as a starting-point it would be recognized by nearly everyone, except philosophers of a rival school, as natural if not inevitable, and as representing, therefore, one important factor in the situation to be accounted for. Feelings do exist, transiently, as this, that, or the other bit of feeling exclusive of all others; and selves do stand apart from other selves with an inner life that, in the most literal sense,

their neighbors do not share directly in the way in which it comes home to the individual himself.

The Idealist has also something to go upon for which he can claim an equally general acceptance; but he starts at the opposite end. He appeals, namely, to the fact that, whatever he may be as an existence, the *meaning* or ideal content of a man's life is plainly not made up of exclusive bits of feeling, but involves intricate relationships with other things. Man as we know him would not be man apart from these connections and interdependencies; and there is no reason to believe we should ever find him lacking in them altogether, however far back in his history we might go. And as the self is not an exclusive self, most truly real in proportion as it stands alone, so the feelings are not isolated fragments, but can be understood and properly evaluated only by considering their place in a larger whole of experience.

2. In bringing this to bear, however, upon the criticism of the orthodox English philosophy, and in trying to show that "feeling" and "self" in the Utilitarian sense are meaningless, the English Idealists give it a twist which runs the risk of setting up a man of straw in theory, and of missing most of the real significance of Utilitarianism for practice. They do this by substituting for the empirical notion of the universe as a collection of concrete existences, a supposed separation between two abstract *aspects,* particularity and universality, out of the former of which alone the empiricist is supposed to be trying to construct a world. Now it probably is true that the Humian definition of the self, taken strictly, would compel us logically to get rid of every vestige of unity, permanence, and identity in experience—a result that would carry with it the abandonment of all possibility of ethical significance. But while this may be a fatal difficulty for metaphysics, and while Utilitarianism as metaphysics had left itself open to attack, the objection cannot be taken as decisive, for the reason that the

Utilitarians did not, as ethicists, actually suppose for working purposes this sort of a self at all. For them, as for anyone else, a human self is a continuous and relatively self-identical being who can look forward and backward, who accumulates reserves of character in the process of experience, and who depends to an indefinite extent on his relation to other things, and in particular to other selves, for the significant content of his life. Even if they have no right to such beliefs they do believe them; and to insist too strongly on their inconsistency is to distort their actual meaning and miss its possible elements of value.

The point to which this warning specially applies is the Idealist's attack on hedonism. It is possible that the reader will find these criticisms of the pleasure doctrine difficult to meet effectively. But it is also almost certain that he will be pursued constantly by the feeling that they are hypercritical if not a little casuistic, and that the Utilitarians cannot be quite so foolish or so innocent of an elementary knowledge of human nature as their critics seem to imply. The objective of the attack is the doctrine that the sole good, and the sole object of desire, is pleasurable feeling. Such a doctrine is in fact open to objections. But its vulnerability is to an appreciable extent dependent on the amount of sympathy one brings to its interpretation; and the Idealists were not inclined to waste much sympathy here. On the contrary they insist on taking the thesis with the utmost logical strictness, without much regard for the concrete human meaning present in the minds of its sponsors. They insist that when a man says "feeling" he must mean bare feeling and nothing in the world beside; and then they go on to point out that feeling in reality exists only as part of some concrete situation, and taken by itself is an abstraction which cannot constitute an end. This is true; but it would hardly have occurred to the Utilitarian to deny it. He is the last man to commit himself to the refined analysis which the critic attributes to him; what-

ever the logical conclusions to which his language is capable of being pressed, he is essentially concrete-minded, and what he really is thinking of is something very different from an abstract essence.

A very similar remark can be made about a more effective turn which the same objection takes. It is assumed by the Idealist that when the Utilitarian calls pleasure the only good, he is committing himself to the doctrine, not only that pleasure is an unreal abstraction, but that any and every pleasure that exemplifies this abstract quality ought logically to be accepted by a man as his good, regardless of anything save its *quantum*. This comes somewhat closer to a fair criticism of the utility philosophy. Nevertheless here again it is plain that what the Utilitarian really intends is something a good deal more sensible than the meaning attributed to him. In strictness it is not the abstract pleasantness of a thing that counts, or ought to count, but its pleasantness *for me,* with my particular nature and tastes; and this constitutes an important check on the unmoral character a pleasure calculus may appear to have. If I personally for whatever reason do not care for a certain "gross" pleasure, the mere fact of its abstract intensity does not compel me to take it into consideration in my own ideal. In particular, there is the fact to be considered that I am a being with reason, memory, æsthetic sensibilities, and persistent sympathies, and that these so modify the pleasantness of isolated gratifications as to affect my judgment in so far as I think of myself, not as a logician trying to reach the conception of a greatest sum of pleasures under all possible conditions, but as a particular self concerned to gratify a limited group of tastes and appetites. At the same time this removes an appreciable portion of the practical difficulties in the work of calculating the greatest happiness. What might well seem an impossible task conceived as a logic of pleasure in the comprehensive sense becomes as a concrete personal problem merely the task of experimenting

to discover what will enable me to satisfy most happily the definite needs of my concrete nature; and this is something that, at least under favorable circumstances, we know can be determined, because we have tried it and measurably succeeded.

3. Assuming, then, that theoretical consequences from a formulated doctrine ought not to lead us, in the interest of logical precision, to ignore entirely the meaning in the philosopher's own mind, it is time to get down to the practical point at issue. Are we justified in using the pleasure it occasions in order to determine whether a given sort of conduct is to be approved, or is there a higher standard that ought to be preferred? It is evident that a genuine problem here exists, and that a case can be made out for an anti-Utilitarian prejudice. It is the same sort of problem that confronts the social reformer. Ought we to regard it as more important that people should be pleased or that they should be improved? Shall we aim at comfortable satisfaction or at quality and distinction? Is it desirable to cater to the likings of the multitude, or should one try to create the conditions of a noble life even at a sacrifice of pleasant feelings? So put, the question will seem to the Idealist almost to answer itself. No matter how content a man may be with his movies, his radio, the excitements of competitive business and of golf, a civilization that looks no higher than this is hardly worth the effort; men would be really better off without their pleasures if thus they were put upon the search for genuine good.

But as an answer to Utilitarianism this needs immediate qualification. In yielding to a critical spirit when one looks down from a higher level on standards that excite his disdain, one also is tempted to forget that "lower" is a relative term which carries condemnation only as it comes in conflict with some positive value, and that it has still to be proved that this last would still be a good were it not for the pleasure that accompanies it. It may quite possibly

be that an element of "nobility" is required to make life genuinely pleasant; certainly pleasure no longer measures up to a reasonable standard if it offends our ethical or artistic sensitiveness. The Idealist—and this is especially evident in the case of T. H. Green—is helped to overlook this by his disposition to use the term "satisfaction" in preference to "pleasure." Satisfaction may, no doubt, in certain circumstances stand merely for the fulfilling of a logical requirement, as when a given quantity "satisfies" an equation. But the word also naturally carries with it the further notion of a resultant agreeableness to feeling. And by calling the attainment of the end of human function a satisfaction while at the same time he is denying it to be a pleasure, the Idealist is able, by the suggestion of agreeable feeling that still attaches to the word, to carry conviction to many minds that otherwise would have hesitated to go along with him.

The real point of quarrel between the two philosophies, however, lies on the practical side. Whether or not we call the truly moral life the more pleasurable as well as the nobler life, in any case we need to ask by what test superiority is to be discovered in the concrete. If it is not by the feeling which it engenders, how does our knowledge of it come? The Idealist enjoys here an unmerited advantage in debate of which he usually does not hesitate to take advantage. Since mankind undoubtedly does believe that some things are more suited to its higher possibilities than others, it responds readily to appeals to its better nature against the low views of the Utilitarians. The wayfaring man is spared the trouble of justifying this preference because he takes the fact as self-evident and in no need of proof. But the philosopher does have to justify any standard he adopts; and it accordingly becomes necessary to ask how successful the Idealist is in doing this.

From both the two ways most common in ethical theory the Idealist is debarred. The test of a subjective feeling

of approval he is particularly anxious to discredit. But neither can he utilize the test of reason, in the form in which it had been most familiar in philosophy. Reason as the ordinary rationalist thinks of it is too abstract for one thing, and too devoid of application to the affairs of life in detail; and, furthermore, in spite of its claim to objective validity, in a sense it is too subjective. It is reason at work in the mind of the individual thinker, and taking its force from inner criteria as they appeal to his sense of intellectual fitness; and such a local and fallible form of reason falls short of meeting the requirements of the Idealist.

Only one alternative remains. Reason must mean World Reason, or reason as it actually enters into the structure of the real universe, in a shape not identifiable with the thought of any individual or number of individuals. Just as the business of the physical scientist is to trace the rational structure of the universe of matter, so the business of the moralist, and his sole business, is to find the laws of morality as they are embedded in the moral structure of society. No other standard is conceivable. The good man, accordingly, is not he who aims to draw from his inner consciousness, or conscience, standards which he opposes to the accepted standards of the world in which he lives. He is, rather, the man who most completely adjusts himself to this world, who fits snugly into his nook in life and fulfils acceptably the duties which by common consent his station imposes, who finds his ideal self most fully realized through a subordination to social demands and the authority of accepted social institutions. The source of moral enlightenment is not conscience or inner feeling on the one hand, or a calculation of the chances of happiness on the other, but the objective facts of the moral world as these present themselves to us as already realized in the family, the church, the state.

Such a point of emphasis serves a useful purpose as a

caution against subjective fancies and the self-esteem of the private judgment. But when we erect it into a final and exclusive method it is less certain to carry enlightened moral opinion with it. It is probably possible to find a value implicit in nearly every established social form and custom. But also it must be evident to an unbiased mind that, mingled with these values, there are innumerable and serious defects that tarnish and at times well nigh destroy them. The working morality of the world puts up with an enormous amount of stupidity, meanness, class selfishness, pride, and tyranny; and it is incredible that the judgments of the individual conscience should not sometimes be superior to the historical judgment which gets expression in established fact.

Here we are faced by a profound and perhaps an ultimate conflict of preferences. For the Idealist, whatever changes are due to come about, at least man must not set himself actively to effect these changes; for self-assertion, self-reliance, a critical skepticism directed toward claims to authority, he has no natural sympathy. The Utilitarian on the other hand is by nature a critic and a rebel, and his eyes turn naturally toward things that need a remedy, just as the Idealist fixes his attention instinctively on the things he can admire, and reserves his wrath for those who do not sufficiently admire them. To what extent either is justified may be an open question. The point is that the Idealist does condemn a number of things which others—a minority no doubt—regard as among the highest virtues, while he exalts as virtues certain qualities—quiescence, and loyalty, and reverence for the established order—which the Utilitarian looks upon with grave suspicion. And it is at least somewhat curious that a philosophy which reduces everything to reason should thus prefer to deprecate the only kind of reason of which we have experience, and should exalt a spontaneous form of progress over one controlled by human intelligence. That man's affairs are bound to

move in the right direction regardless of human aberrations and folly is an assurance that comes naturally to the uncritical believer in an overruling providence. When providence, however, is sublimated into an impersonal law of reason, the logic of the belief is considerably less apparent. If we examine the actual facts, as science has attempted with some success to do, the impression of a divine reasonableness in history is certain to be obscured. Instead, we find so many evidences of gross superstition, of survival due to blind chance or luck, of partial and imperfect devices grasped at desperately through the need of the moment and perpetuated in spite of their obvious discomforts and ultimate disadvantages, of selfish class interest taking advantage of opportunity to twist the course of development in a direction hurtful to other classes, that a confidence in the World Reason as against man's reason suffers a substantial diminution.

Furthermore many significant crises in human history can only with much forcing be characterized in terms of the continuity of some self-realizing principle. Not infrequently there comes a time when some man or group of men arises with a revolutionary program to which past ideas and institutions have to bow; indeed, by a strange logic, it is to these instances of originality that later generations are apt to pay the highest reverence after they are once established, using them to discourage attempts at any further novelty. And just as we are now pretty generally agreed that the spirit of paganism, or of feudalism, or of political absolutism, was something that needed, not to be lived up to more faithfully, but to be corrected and in a sense abolished, so it is not an irrational anticipation that institutions still strongly entrenched at the present day—militarism, or caste, or the domination of property rights—are in line for ultimate extinction. And it is far from likely that, among the forces that will be responsible for this, there will be absent a mobilization of public opinion arising from

an appeal to the individual conscience with its sense of fitness and of fairness—an opinion which always takes its start from the more sensitive insight of a small minority, in conscious opposition to accepted views and customs.

Nor as a practical working standard is the test of happiness so obviously inferior to that which the Idealist proposes. Legislators would be at least no more likely to go wrong if, instead of setting as their goal the maintenance of familiar institutional forms of life, while only as a secondary consideration asking what and how many men these really satisfy, they were first of all to consider how far such forms contribute to the concrete joy of living for flesh and blood human beings. Certainly in such a case we should not find them committing quite so many ghastly mistakes in sacrificing whole classes, or generations even, to the sanctity of some abstract idea of glory or patriotism or property rights. And even for the individual it is arguable that he would be better off if, instead of acquiescing in the duties laid upon him by public opinion, law, or custom, and subduing his inclinations and fancies to fit conventional molds, he were to form the habit of bringing all these external demands to the bar of his individual judgment, and appraising each by the standard, not of its prevalence or respectability, but of the real inner satisfaction it brings him as an individual.

4. The two most significant names in connection with the transfer of German ethics to British soil are those of T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley. In Bradley, Hegel speaks again: and among philosophers he probably stands, to the English mind, as the most powerful and persuasive of the expositors of "my station and its duties" as an ethical creed, and of the conception of moral philosophy not as throwing light on the possibilities of a better life, but as an attempt merely to reduce to theory the morality already current in the world. In the case of Green, however, a more original note is struck. Green's spiritual affinity is with Fichte

even more than it is with either Kant or Hegel; and his influence has been sufficiently important to call for a more extended examination.

The significance of Green lies less in his logical elaboration of the Hegelian standpoint than it does in the new interest which he brings to this. The natural leanings of such a philosophy are, as has been sufficiently pointed out, strongly in the direction of an absolutism in metaphysics combined with a realism in politics and social affairs—a realism that emphasizes the insignificance of the individual man in comparison with his institutional surroundings, and that interprets for practical purposes the meaning of these institutions in terms of their abstract historic value, instead of thinking of them as temporary and inadequate pieces of machinery for realizing individual welfare. From this hard-boiled temperament, with its scorn for the nice discriminations of a tender conscience and for the aspirations of the idealist to be better than his generation, Green is far removed. For him it is individual character that constitutes the one human good, and ideal aspiration that acts as the great driving force in moral progress. Green may, indeed, be taken as the most able exponent of that moralistic type of evolutionary idealism which the advent of Christianity had made a working force in human conduct, and which stands opposed alike to the naturalistic notion of development, and to the strictly logical idealism of the Hegelians proper.

Green's meaning can best be got at through contrast with the Utilitarian type of theory which he found dominating the thought of England; but first a few words are necessary about his connection with the Hegelian metaphysics, and the manner in which he is enabled from such a starting-point to reach his own substantially different outcome. This comes about through the part which the "self" plays in Green's philosophy. There is a possibility of interpreting Hegel's absolute spirit also as an absolute Self; but for the

most part he leaves the impression that reality is, for him, the purely logical unity of that complex network of intellectual relationships which it is the primary business of the philosophic thinker to unravel. And in transforming the concept of universal Spirit explicitly into the concept of a universal Self, Green manages to impart a novel flavor to his own speculations. The rationalistic aloofness of Hegel is humanized; and therewith the individual, his conscience and his destiny, comes to resume the importance it has almost always had for English thought.

Put briefly, reality for Green is a universal Self or Spirit —God—which is differentiated into a multitude of private selves. Individuals have no being apart from this comprehensive system. What we know as a private self is definable as an organism which becomes a vehicle for the progressive realization, in time, of a universal and eternally complete consciousness,[1] and whose life is, therefore, only to be understood in terms, not of its separate existence, but of the spiritual or social system of which it is a part. The end that constitutes the good of individual man is to realize this universal and social nature which belongs to him implicitly; it takes the form of striving after an ideal—the ideal self. It is the essence of an ideal that it should be, on the one hand, somehow real, since otherwise it will have a hold only on the imagination and not upon the will and conscience; while also in another sense it is not real, but needs to be progressively achieved. The two demands are both met by Green's metaphysics. As a mere individual living his life in the time series, man obviously is incomplete; he has not yet attained his goal. But man is not merely a natural being in time. The very fact that he is a *self-conscious* being, a *rational* self, shows that he stands above the time series, since no mere item in a series can be conscious of the series as a whole. Through reason, accordingly, man's true essence is revealed to him as a timeless

[1] *Prolegomena to Ethics,* § 67.

self which is not a part of the world of nature, or subject to the necessary causation that governs this world. It is only through the presence of such a spiritual principle, giving unity to phenomena, that nature itself exists; and what is constitutive of nature cannot at the same time be subject to natural laws.

5. Man's destiny, then, his supreme good, is to free himself from the passions and desires that belong to him as an animal being, by subordinating them to the realization of a more ultimate nature—the individualized expression of an absolute Spirit. What this means to Green more concretely can best be examined by turning now to the alternative theory to which his own is set in contrast. The original defect of hedonism is that it attempts to formulate the good in terms of feeling. But feeling as such cannot be an end. As feeling, it is a momentary phenomenon that appears and vanishes; whereas an end must be something permanent, persisting through time, bringing the past into connection with the future. In other words, only a rational being can have an end; and this means the necessary presence of a permanent self which underlies the procession of the feelings and takes them out of time. Even if we were to grant that man finds nothing good except as it is pleasurable, it still is not a mere succession of desultory pleasant feelings at which he aims; his end is not feeling as such, but *himself as enjoying* feeling—a form of self-realization, or of "character." And the reason is, once more, that only when there is present to a series of feelings a permanent self not itself a member of the series does what we know as a connected experience become possible. Much the same thing can be said about desire. It is not desire as a purely natural force that determines the action of a rational creature, though such desire may exist as an animal fact in the form of appetites and lusts. Genuine desire is always for some future *object,* and not a mere inchoate feeling or bare movement. And to constitute an object there

is required the presence and action of that objectifying principle of self-consciousness of which the entire natural world is the creation.

It will be unnecessary to attempt a detailed estimate of the argument by which Green tries to show the contradictions involved in the notion of pleasure as a good, and of the greatest sum of pleasures as a man's highest end. But this last point, in particular, throws so much light on the nature of his own alternative ideal that it may conveniently be taken as a starting-point. Green holds that the idea of a greatest sum of pleasures is logically an impossible one; and, in fact, the conception is not free from difficulties. It may at least be admitted that we have no right to talk about a sum of pleasures so long as pleasure is defined as something that makes a momentary appearance and then vanishes to leave no trace. Once grant, however, the existence of a self capable empirically of memory and expectation, and there seems no reason why a man should not at least be able to set as his goal a continuous series of the most pleasurable feelings he can manage. Such a self, able to look before and after—and we know that, irrespective of any theory, actual selves can look before and after—is not confined to the bare succession of momentary states. The pleasure of his present state is flavored alike by the recollection of past pleasures and, in particular, by the anticipation of an uninterrupted continuation of agreeable existence. And in an intelligible sense, accordingly, his notion of the good may take the form of a summation of pleasurable experiences.

Green himself admits all this. He insists, however, that between a continuously pleasant life—which he allows is a practicable goal [2]—and the greatest possible sum of pleasures, there is a sharp distinction. The latter conception has no more meaning than has the "greatest possible quantity of time"; the "greatest sum" is an indefinite and therefore

[2] *Ibid.*, § 361.

negative conception.[3] And if it is asked why the "greatest happiness" formula should not be allowed to have a meaning for practice that falls short of this impossible notion—why it should not be taken simply as an indefinitely happy life with as many pleasures and as few pains as possible—Green's answer is that we cannot so define the good for this reason, that only in so far as we are in possession of the notion of an ideal "best" can we talk about a "better" at all; and the notion of the "best" life—of a perfect state of existence—is something very different from that of an indefinite pleasurable content. No doubt we may use the "better" as a term that is relative not to a "best" but to a "worse"; and in this sense it may be an object of *desire*. But to give rise to moral approval it must presuppose a standard of which it falls short, and which exercises compulsion on us only for the reason that it represents an absolute value.

There is one other distinctive aspect of Green's argument—the claim that the notion of a sum of pleasures is an impossible one because a sum of pleasures cannot exist all at once. It is this that gives to "character" its superiority to pleasure as a goal. While pleasure is a fleeting and momentary fact, character on the other hand represents a cumulative end; and as such it may remain in our possession, and be aimed at as a whole.

But the assumption that nothing is truly real that cannot be gathered together in a single timeless moment—a notion to which, for a creature living in time, there is no possibility of giving any positive form except in terms of a supreme moment of experience to be looked forward to as consummating the entire value of a man's life—is not one that the empiricist is likely to accept. Even apart from the fact that we can form no distinct idea of such a complete self-realization, it is open to question whether it is what a man really looks forward to with desire. In some sense we doubt-

[3] *Ibid.*, § 359; *Works*, Vol. I, p. 307.

less wish to see the values we realize passed along to fecundate the attainments of the future. But the fact that we are permanently changed by our experiences, and that this change is a condition of getting still more satisfactory experiences in the future, is not by any means equivalent to saying that the only rational goal is some unattainably remote moment when all experiences alike shall be crowded together in a single luminous point of time. It may rather be that progress is the essence of the matter, and that the particular way a being who lives in time realizes himself is just by making the most of each passing moment, and not by a single wholesale transaction.

6. Perhaps the best way of understanding Green is by taking him as the representative of certain tendencies very prevalent in his own day in England. The Victorian ideal, with its slightly sentimentalized reverence for character and inner purity and a tender conscience, its painful brooding over the "ideal," and its aristocratic aloofness from the coarse and common, is not unattractive in its way. But it no longer seems to the present age a self-evident standard for the moral life. We are much more inclined to emphasize the flow of life itself, with "character" playing an important but by no means an exclusive rôle. Permanence may still persist as an ethical requirement. But the more we insist, with Green, on the objectivity of values, the more it is open to question whether the ideal of an "effectual self-devotion to the work of developing the perfect character" in oneself and others [4] is what best satisfies the demand. Rather we might expect conduct normally to be concerned less with furbishing up and rounding out the character of the agent than with producing actual results that shall add to the abiding worth and beauty of existence.

In terms of logic it is possible for a self-realization theory of the type of Green's to turn this objection, by refusing to admit that the alternatives are at all exclusive. It does

[4] *Works,* II, 347.

this through its central doctrine of the identity of the individual and the universal or social self. The denial that the individual as such is real takes for Green the special form that, since the essence of all reality is spirit, the private man finds his true life only in the social organism—a doctrine too familiar nowadays, and too obviously valid in some interpretation, to need elaboration. And the whole point of such a conception is, it may be urged, that it overcomes the superficial contrast between values realized in character and values realized in the outer world, since character is itself nothing whatever save as it issues in real achievements in the shape of social good. Nevertheless even if this last claim could be left unqualified, it still remains true that for man as a psychological being there must always remain a difference between the two ideals as conscious goals. For God it may be possible to overcome the distinction between the individual and the social whole, and to see them as identical in the light of eternity. But man, so long as he has to understand the world serially, a few things at a time, cannot possibly avoid disjunctions. Theoretically he may hold to the faith that all is one; but in practice things still stand off more or less by themselves in their individuality. His own character is for him something other than the social good, no matter how intimately the two may be intertwined; and his mental emphasis and direction when he is envisaging the one has, therefore, its own peculiar nature, which changes when his attention focuses on the other. And every important difference in the spiritual life of man resolves itself in the end into such a difference of emphasis.

Now the meticulous conscientiousness and introspection of the Victorian idealist on the one hand, and, on the other, the outgoing enthusiasm for experience and for the creation of objective values in terms of an abounding life, represent such a difference of spiritual outlook; and as an actual phenomenon this is not altered in the slightest by the

abstract possibility, or even certainty, that there exists an Absolute in whom all differences merge. For man it still remains something that marks off one type of goal from others, and in so doing affects in an important way his rules of conduct. Thus one man will scrupulously avoid an act of lying, we will say, as an intolerable stain upon his soul; while for another it will seem merely a sort of refined selfishness to allow his own immaculateness to weigh too heavily in the balance when some objective value is at stake.

And, curiously enough, the same attempt to do away with what, from the empirical point of view, is the seemingly inevitable contrast between the individual and the social conditions of his life, leads also, in a different context, to a position likely to arouse doubts of an exactly opposite sort; it seems, that is, to hypostatize society in a way to jeopardize the intrinsic value of the private man. Here again there is no trouble in abstract theory. By submerging himself in the social medium, man is by hypothesis realizing to the utmost his own individual nature. But so long as our human outlook is unable to grasp completely the standpoint of the whole, such a social emphasis inevitably tends to deprive the notion of individual self-realization of its concrete content. The result, as Hegel had made plain, is a philosophy disposed to be actively hostile to all that historically individualism has meant. In practice, an insistence on the fundamental value of the individual has always, and apparently must always, carry with it a certain impatience of the demands of society, which stand for general values rather than for personal and specific ones, and which are almost sure in consequence to involve a degree of respect for conventional forms that is in danger of minimizing their necessary limitations and inequalities. The individualist on the other hand is one who insists on finding the ultimate source and test of values in himself

rather than in the more massive outcome of an historical development governed by unconscious laws; and he inclines to be critical, therefore, of established rules, and to set over against their authority the need for free experimentation of his own.

It is here Green's special place in the development of idealism lies. He combines a thoroughgoing metaphysics of absolutism with a sincere interest in progress and reform, and a real attempt to bring them within the framework of an eternal and changeless universe; and along with this there goes a concern for the personal integrity of the individual as against the overindividual values of an institutional or social whole, and a desire to allow the private man a measure of responsibility for social progress. And the way in which he tries to reconcile the two demands brings us back again to that peculiar Victorian quality of his idealism which is on the whole its most characteristic feature, and which, in Green, has a double aspect. On the one hand it means an unremitting attention to personal perfection, a pure heart, a will set upon the noblest and the best. While I do not know what perfection is, I am assured that there *is* a best, in the attainment of which alone I can be satisfied; and though I cannot aim at it directly, since I am ignorant of its actual content, I can at least be sure that it is something better than anything I have yet attained. To recognize such an ideal best is thus at the same time to recognize a duty to put forth our utmost effort for its realization. This is, indeed, the essence of obligation, of the "desirable" as opposed to the "desired"; as rational beings we are bound to aim at an ultimate or absolute end, such as our own perfection offers.[5] This constant compulsion of the better in the form of a preoccupation with a perfect ideal of character is, accordingly, the driving force of progress; it leaves a man dissatisfied except

[5] *Prolegomena,* § 367.

as he is always pressing forward to a goal which, as an individual, he will never reach, but which he knows to be eternally realized in his truer and completer self that is one with the Absolute or God.[6]

Here lies the distinction of the modern from the Greek notion of perfection. For the self-complete it substitutes infinity, and for attainment a liberation of powers in the interest of something too high ever to be fully realized by finite man. And in particular this leaves a place for the Christian notion of self-sacrifice which the Greek ideal excluded, and so leads to the second or social character of true perfection. For the good is not attained by me except as it is open to every other man as well; and it therefore becomes the duty of the modern man not simply to aim at a completeness of development for himself, but to sink his private good—and this will mean sacrifice—in the welfare of humanity. The ideal of virtue thus involves, in addition to conscientiousness, a devotion of character and life to the perfecting of man and the extension of the possibilities of noble living to ever wider circles; it is a compound of the ideal of the moral reformer and of the self-questioning saint.[7]

7. That the craving for a better self more in accordance with the true ideal of humanity enters into a genuinely moral life most people will admit. But while ideal aspiration may supply a motive force, it does not supply direction, unless, indeed, we are to take the ideal of perfection as sufficiently fulfilled by a self-sacrifice that aims to create a similar self-sacrificing devotion in everybody else, without regard to any more positive content to the good life.[8] And so we are brought back again to the problem that confronted Hegel. Granting that a sense of inner dissatisfaction with present attainment constitutes the spring of moral growth, how is the finite human being to determine the particular road along which true growth lies, when the

[6] *Ibid.*, §§ 172*sq.*, 195. [7] *Ibid.*, §§ 279, 289, 300. [8] *Cf. ibid.*, § 289.

content of the ideal is, by definition, forever beyond his intellectual grasp? And if we are not prepared to accept the course which the individualist prefers—an experimentalism which trusts to the inner play of impulses in the man who seeks for satisfaction, and the actual success or failure of his efforts to find the life that will render him content—there seems no easy escape from the alternative which Hegel had impressively set forth. Since it is felt to be necessary above all things to avoid any catering to individual caprice, the cause of progress must be placed outside the self-conscious human will, in the superhuman world of an eternal ideal attaining its ends along the lines of an absolute logic; and the duty of man becomes, accordingly, not to alter reality, but to identify himself with the world process in the highest form in which it has become embodied up to date.[9]

In this conclusion Green is inextricably entangled by his metaphysics. But at the same time he feels its human unsatisfactoriness and is constantly attempting to modify its spiritual emphasis in so far as his logic will permit.[10] The more natural outcome, it is difficult not to believe, is the one that Hegel chooses—a complacency toward the way the world is being run, and an irritated protest at any attempt on the part of individuals to improve it substantially, or to develop a sensitiveness of conscience that outstrips its official expressions. Green stands for a middle course; he is a liberal as opposed to conservative and radical alike. But, as a consequence, the heart and the head do not in Green work so closely in sympathy as in Hegel. His reason tells him that the world is God's world, and therefore good. His instincts tell him that for many of its inhabitants the world is very far from being good, and his sympathies urge him strongly to make it better.

And the compromise is the one typical of liberalism as a political force. Theoretically it consists in holding that

[9] *Cf. ibid.*, §§ 176, 179, 216, 234. [10] *Cf. ibid.*, § 298.

present institutions are in their essence good—so that we ought not to try to change them radically—while yet recognizing the imperfection of some of their workings and the consequent need of reform.[11] Practically it means the duty of an upper and possessing class to relieve the miseries of the poor and helpless, while at the same time avoiding the risks that wait on any dislocation of the social order. That this is likely to be a fully successful method of reform is less generally admitted now than it was in Green's own day. The force of radicalism has greatly increased since then. And with the sharpening of the lines of political cleavage between those who do and those who do not think that for the health of society fundamental rather than superficial changes are required, it is noteworthy that the political liberal has shown a suspicious readiness more and more to cast in his lot with the true conservative.

What for the philosopher it is chiefly important to observe is, that such an instability is inherent in Green's doctrine. The only perfectly safe method of advance, for absolutism, consists in waiting until a novelty has become established before we welcome it; the moment I begin to pick and choose between the various possible forms of an institutional ideal, and to try to improve upon the opinions that satisfy my social betters, I am inevitably in practice passing from the test of accomplished fact to that of private judgment. I am either taking a chance on the ability of my private mind to explore successfully the tangled world of fact, pick out the essence of a complicated situation, and reason logically to the practical consequences that follow from this in a particular new situation; or—and this is perhaps more likely—I am trusting to the authority of my own instinctive feeling for human values, and am using these to appraise, and perhaps condemn, the objective outcome of great historical forces. It is arguable that the individual

[11] *Cf. ibid.*, § 301.

ought never to adopt this attitude. But if he does adopt it, as at times he surely will, then it seems very difficult to find either a logical or a practical reason for his stopping short at some arbitrary point, and applying his private test to superficial and never to more fundamental matters

CHAPTER XIX

SCIENTIFIC ETHICS

SPENCER · HUXLEY · COMTE · CLIFFORD · STEPHEN · GUYAU.

1. THE phrase "scientific ethics" has a number of possible implications. In the broadest sense any reputable theory of ethics might claim to be scientific, in so far as science is merely an unprejudiced examination of the facts in some particular field with the intent to describe them accurately and to bring them into relationships that throw light upon their meaning. Something more than this commonly is meant, however; an ethics is in modern days not usually called scientific unless it shows some pretty close relation to the methods and data of the recognized physical sciences, and to biology in particular.

In this last connection the field of inquiry where the significance of the results is least open to dispute lies outside the scope of the present undertaking. Especially since the rise of the theory of evolution with the new light it has thrown on the facts of primitive human culture, much valuable work has been done in accounting for the origin of the particular forms that ethical opinion and custom have taken at various times and places. As here understood, however, the point of a "scientific" ethics is not so much a question of the genesis of morals as of a claim on the part of scientific method to supply an answer to the traditional problems of philosophy concerning the *validity* of the ethical ideal. In practice it may not be found possible to keep the two questions separate. Nevertheless they give rise to different types of problem. Thus there can be no doubt that the theory of natural selection has much to say

about the circumstances under which morality, alike in its general background of sentiment and in the form of particular rules of conduct, has come to play a part in the developing history of mankind. But this can be granted without prejudice to our answer to the further question: Is survival value itself the source of moral value? Does the fact that a given form of conduct has been successful in the struggle for existence give it a claim upon our obedience and respect as well?

What the scientific ethicist in the distinctive sense proposes, then, is to take some aspect of scientific method outside the field of ethics proper, or some hypothesis at which scientific method has arrived, and to use this as a premise for establishing ethical standards. And accordingly, in spite of the standing quarrel between science and metaphysics, an ethics of science in this particular meaning is really in principle closer to the metaphysical than to the empirical standpoint. It is a form of rationalism, which subordinates the method of experience, and experiment, to universal premises arrived at otherwise than through induction from particulars. A very general impression has existed in more recent times that such an undertaking is not only possible, but that it is self-evidently the only valid form for an ethics to take. A belief of this sort is implied in the widely accepted "economic interpretation of history," in the confident though confused appeal to natural selection to substantiate opinions that happen to be favored, in the tone of relativism and moral skepticism that is apt to characterize the utterances of scientists, and in particular of their literary mouthpieces. Here we shall be concerned only with the less frequent attempts at a systematic exposition and defense of such a view; and among such systems that of Herbert Spencer still remains the most comprehensive and the most impressive.

2. What Spencer conceived as the special advance of his own contribution to ethical theory over that of the

Utilitarians was the possibility it supplied of removing moral conduct from the field of mere experiment, and giving it a deductive and necessary character. With the fundamental hedonism of Utilitarianism Spencer has no quarrel. It is true the term "good" has one meaning which does not directly implicate pleasurable consciousness. We speak of a thing as good of its kind when it fulfils satisfactorily its function; and as applied to organisms this has a significance of capital importance in Spencer's thinking. But also there is another feature equally essential in the human concept of the good. A means or instrument is good in so far as it is effective in accomplishing its end; but wherein lies the goodness of the end itself? Spencer agrees with the Utilitarian in answering that such an ultimate goodness can be understood only as the end comes home to consciousness in the form of pleasurable feeling. We cannot sit down in cold blood and justify to ourselves the worth of living except as it is a source of pleasure or of satisfaction. And consequently the only end a rational being can propose to himself is in terms of a surplus of pleasure over pain—an end becoming "absolutely" good in so far as pain vanishes entirely and leaves a maximum attainment of pleasure.

Nevertheless while this is so, the attempt to use pleasure in its mere empirical existence as the conscious tool for bringing about the best life has various drawbacks, which opponents of Utilitarianism had from the start been prompt to point out; though they failed to make clear the underlying ground of its deficiencies. This defect is, for Spencer, the same defect that vitiates all previous ethical theories; it is due to an inadequate sense of scientific causality. If we can see *why* a thing gives pleasure now, then, and only then, are we in a position to judge of its validity and its continuance. The business of a scientific ethics is, accordingly, to pass beyond a Utilitarian calculation of pleasures in terms of past experience to the conditions that enable

the human organism to preserve itself, develop its resources, and leave behind healthy and successful offspring. This organic process will be accompanied by pleasure, or there would be no reason to call it good. No animal would exert itself to continue an existence in which there was a definite balance of pain; and the fact that a vital operation is accompanied by pleasure is in a general way an indication that the action is life-enhancing. Pleasure is connected with an increase of vitality in the organism which furthers the vital process in the effort to prolong itself, while pain is the sign of vital depression and maladjustment; and it follows from the principles of evolution that painful processes are bound to be eliminated, and that all habits of action that succeed in adjusting the organism to its surroundings will ultimately become pleasurable. The fact, therefore, that a being finds certain conduct pleasant is *prima facie* evidence that it has proved useful in the struggle for existence, and so can be identified with well-being. Evidence, but not proof. For not only may actions that on the whole are useful under special circumstances lead to injury, but, and in particular, a habit that has been developed to meet the needs of one situation may prove destructive if either the environment or the organism happens to be altered.

Here, then, is the first outstanding feature of Spencer's conception of a scientific ethics. For the reason that human life can be called absolutely good only in so far as pain has been removed, it is necessary, in order to know the goal at which we ought to aim, to understand the conditions under which a wholly pleasurable life becomes possible; and for this we require, not an empirical calculation merely, but a whole scientific philosophy of the natural universe. Such a philosophy Spencer was prepared to supply; and accordingly the details of his ethics have to be interpreted as a part of the comprehensive formula of evolution. But before turning to this it will simplify matters to rule out

a more modest aspect of his plea for a scientific treatment of conduct.

It is undoubtedly the case that any attempt to calculate probabilities in the way of pleasure-getting which ignores the matter of their causation—their dependence, that is, on the objective forces of the environment—is bound to be unsatisfactory. But the Utilitarians were not ignorant of this. The field in which they personally were most interested was that of the social virtues; and they were perfectly aware that sympathy and justice and the like are qualities related to the preservation and development of society. Nor did they fail to recognize that more distant and more general consequences ought not to be lost sight of in a concern for present feeling; and in tracing such consequences they had of necessity to employ a knowledge of causal sequences. The same thing is equally obvious in the case of the personal virtues. Naturally we ought not to take immediate pleasure as our guide to the exclusion of the remoter biological effects; the causal relationships involved in self-preservation and the maintenance of the species ought to control the quest for pleasures in particular. But all this is something no intelligent person is going to overlook; and the guidance it gives is so obvious and so general in its bearings that the Utilitarians might well be excused from going out of their way to enlarge upon it.

But this is not what Spencer dwells on either. While he uses such obvious considerations to justify his contention, what really distinguishes his treatment from that of his predecessors is not a deduction of ethical practice from specific scientific laws, but an attempt to deduce them from the larger and more speculative generalizations that represent the real interest of his philosophy. And here his superiority is more open to dispute.

The special contribution of science to human conduct centers about the notion of adjustment to environment—of a harmony, or moving equilibrium, between man's instincts

and the circumstances that call them into action. In some interpretation this is the teaching of everyday experience. No man can lead a satisfying life, or attain the good, whose inner demands are constantly being thwarted by a discordant and irresponsive world. At the same time the phrase needs to be interpreted, since it might be made to stand for something that experience does not so evidently corroborate. For Spencer it means a state of things where, like a well-oiled and smoothly running machine, life responds to the demands for action made upon it instinctively, without friction or the need for effort—the sort of life we are accustomed to attribute to the ant or bee.[1] But it is not at all clear that in this sense adjustment will appear to most men the height of human good; on the contrary, it is more likely they will be found reacting against the notion.

Spencer might say that the repugnance here shown is an irrational one, which the further progress of evolution will remove. But before accepting this as an answer it would be necessary to consider another aspect of his method, on which it is worth while dwelling for a moment. The task of persuading men generally to disobey their present instincts of approval by means of a scientific proof that these are going to alter in the fairly remote future is not likely to meet with much practical success. Nor is the difficulty lessened by a suspicion that the advice is out of harmony with Spencer's own evolutionary principles. There is a paradox in defining goodness in an evolving universe in terms of a future outcome regarded as settled and definitive. It is conceivable that a particular form of organism should become so thoroughly fitted to persistent features of its surroundings as to be incapable of further progress, while at the same time the universe as a whole goes on its way to new permutations. But it is a conception that applies much more readily to very simple organ-

[1] *Cf. Principles of Ethics,* Vol. I, p. 300.

isms than it does to man; in his case, the complexity of adjustment is so great that an unchanging organism would seem to imply an unchanging world as well, in which the law of evolution has ceased to work. And at any rate our right to pick out a particular point of equilibrium, as constituting an absolute standard of human ethics, needs more justification from the evolutionist than Spencer attempts to give.

A further point arises also. Spencer's deductions start from the principle that pleasure is bound to accompany successfully functioning energies, which he takes to mean energies that are perfectly adjusted to a stable environment: it is in this way that he demonstrates the necessary imperfection of life in its present transition stages, where the mixture of pain with pleasure renders it impossible to apply an absolute standard. But a different conclusion apparently might have been drawn. If life as we know it, life under the sway of the evolutionary process, is engaged in conquering conditions and molding them to its purposes in order to give natural selection material to work upon, why should not pleasure belong to the struggle itself as well as to the finished product? It is when obstacles remain to be surmounted, and so the chance for suffering exists, that the stimulus of pleasure is most badly needed; and it is entirely conceivable that an added intensity and vividness of pleasure feeling might more than make up for the attendant pains. As a matter of fact this is what seems to be the case. It is a real objection to Spencer's conception of happiness that it fails to recognize the part which the overcoming of difficulties plays in the normal life, and looks too exclusively for its content to that placid sort of existence which both psychology and experience indicate may well be, instead, a source of ennui and emotional emptiness.

To recapitulate, the first point in Spencer's ethics has connected itself with the notion of adjustment to environ-

ment, from which it follows that a scientific ethics can speak with full authority only when it is dealing with an ideal state where adjustment has actually become complete; it loses its strict necessity in terms of man as at present he exists. For it is evident that the human animal is very far as yet from that entire harmony with its surroundings which is the condition of securing pleasure unmixed with pain, and so a complete attainment of the good. His life is ruled by many contingencies which science cannot bring within its formulas; and he still has, therefore, to depend to a large extent on empirical guidance. At the same time a scientific ethics has its message for him. If it does not set up rules of conduct, at least it points out the goal ahead and supplies a compass to indicate the general direction he is to follow. Consequently what Spencer now is called upon more in particular to do is to determine the actual law or principle that serves to guide present man in his attempt progressively to realize the notion of an absolute good.

3. The central problem of the practice of ethics takes for Spencer the general form, already familiar in the preceding development of English theory, of a need for reconciling egoism with altruism. Neither of the two can give place entirely to the other; it is equally necessary that the individual should attain his own good—which means his own pleasure—and that such a good should not clash with the similar good of other men. On the other hand it is obvious that as things now go a complete harmony is not attainable. Nor can a relative ethics ever hope to solve the problem authoritatively in detail. But science can explain the origin of the conflict; and it can point to the possibility, or rather the necessity, of its ultimate solution, and the path which this solution is bound to take.

The origin of the egoistic pleasures has its sufficient explanation in the Darwinian principle of natural selection. Through their connection with the struggle for existence such pleasures are, it is true, endowed with potentialities

of harm as well, to ourselves if we fail, to others if we succeed. But the necessity that each one should look out for himself and demand his own private satisfaction is an unescapable condition of his maintaining himself and leaving offspring.

Along with his self-seeking impulses, we also find man coming into the world with an additional set of tendencies. For these also evolution can account; a philosophically enlightened scientist could have predicted them beforehand. Since evolution aims at a constantly increasing complexity of existence, its demands will better be met by a state of things where individuals coöperate to extend the possibilities of life open to each than by leaving the separate individual to rely wholly on his own efforts; and man is therefore bound to become a social being provided with characteristics other than the self-seeking ones. This raises, to be sure, certain questions about the Darwinian principle of selection, to which it will be necessary to return. But, in a general way, the new social and sympathetic impulses can still avail themselves of the principle by a shift of emphasis. For while the social feelings tend to interfere with that ruthless struggle for existence through which unfit specimens are weeded out, in another way they become themselves an instrument in the hands of natural selection by transferring the struggle from the individual to the group. A group is likely to succeed in its competition with rival groups in proportion as its members are bound together by ties of good feeling and mutual helpfulness; and the progress of social man is, therefore, necessarily accompanied by an increasing influence of the social sympathies, which compete with and tend to weaken, at least within the group, the egoistic tendencies that have for their object a mere private good.

We are now in a position to account for the present state of man, where, as has appeared, a relative and not an absolute standard of ethics rules. A complete adaptation to

environment would eliminate that clash of interests between man and man which for the moment inevitably mingles pain with pleasure, and so prevents the full attainment of the good. But man is still in the making. To the social state where the sympathies are slowly molding him to a life of harmony with his fellows he brings a heritage from the past hostile to the requirements of social living; and it will take time to get rid of these anti-social tendencies even under the most favorable of circumstances. In the meantime there is one condition in particular which is highly unfavorable. Man is now, to be sure, a social creature; within the limits of his own tribe or country he has become fairly well subdued to his social background. But unfortunately the inner forces that make for strife rather than for harmony are kept alive by the fact that the struggle for existence, which has lost a good deal of its importance as between individuals, still persists among groups. It is this fact of war, and of the military culture of which war is the occasion, that for Spencer in a special way illuminates our understanding of human history and enables us to prophesy, on the principles of evolution, history's future course; progress will mean first of all the progressive displacement of a warlike by an industrial and coöperative status. On the same principle light is thrown on the facts of existing human nature and the deficiencies of present ethical attainment. The virtues and sentiments suitable to a state of war clash in the human temperament with the social virtues; and this is what makes it impossible that present man should do what is absolutely right, or attain that absolute good which science nevertheless sets before him as his ideal goal.

An ideal goal, but not a *mere* ideal. For science not only tells us the nature of the goal; it gives the assurance that the end is on the way to be attained. Such an assurance lies, once more, in the great source of all necessary truth, the formula of evolution. Since the inevitable course of devel-

opment is toward a completer state of unified diversity, an industrial civilization based upon agreement and coöperation must eventually win out over the mutual hostility alike of individuals and of nations. And with the loss of occasion for their exercise, egoistic tendencies will cease to play their present rôle. It is not that they will disappear; self-preservation will always remain a necessity. The real solution of the ethical paradox, and the only possible one, lies in the progressive merging of egoism and altruism in subordination to a single end; and this can happen only as the sympathetic impulses that now work sporadically and hesitatingly in conduct shall have become so omnipresent, and so ingrained in man's constitution, as to constitute the main source of individual pleasure. Altruism will then have become an effortless second nature, accompanied by no sense of sacrifice; and in working for the highest satisfaction open to me I shall thus at the same time be working for the good of my fellow man as well. We already see this partially accomplished in existing social pleasures and the approval that social acts elicit. And when we approach the limit of complete adjustment which evolution guarantees will sooner or later come about, it follows that a new human nature will have been born which finds satisfaction for itself only in such acts as also give pleasure to other sentient beings, or at least do not bring them pain.

4. And here we may revert again to one central aspect of the ideal of conduct which is implied in this reasoning. Just as in the case of a theological ethics, the main practical burden of a scientific ethics as Spencer sees it is connected with the remoter future. How a man ought to act in the particular situations that confront him now science cannot tell him; he has to decide in terms of compromise, to an extent unprincipled. But by shifting the center of gravity from present happiness to an ultimate happiness, from the greatest possible satisfaction of existing man to the evolution of a perfect humanity, a character is given

to ethical inquiry more congenial to the scientific mind. And this is in fact for Spencer its main interest. The one unqualified moral duty is to work for a better and happier humanity, by furthering, or at any rate by refusing to obstruct, the evolutionary processes that are slowly but certainly moving toward such an issue.

The first thing that calls for comment here is the question of motivation. If pleasure is the sole good, then a given man will only work for that which promises pleasure for himself; and save in a few rare instances this will not naturally be found in making sacrifices for distant generations. Nor can we rely here on the compulsion of organized society which in other cases furnishes a motive; the compulsion which society puts upon its members in the common interest is not identical with compulsion in the interest of unknown persons in the future, of whom the average statesman never so much as thinks. It is true that nature, if we give her time enough, will, Spencer thinks, supply the lack. But it is one thing to say that nature is working toward a certain result; it is a very different thing to say that man has either duty or inclination to assist its efforts. Any given agent will have such a personal reason only in so far as it conduces to his own individual happiness; and Spencer makes no real attempt to prove that this will be the case. A pronounced development of the sympathetic feelings might supply a sufficient motive in the shape of an absorbing interest in these remote generations. But the very nature of sympathy as a feeling stands in the way of its wide extension in this particular form. Sympathy is a sentiment that normally is elicited by the actual presence of its object; and it can be passed on to the remote and to the general only through the medium of intellectual processes that tend to weaken its poignancy. Nor is this all. An interest in the evolution of mankind is constantly making it necessary actually to put a damper on the spontaneous outflow of immediate sympathy; and this contradiction between a

natural reaction to present suffering, and the hard-heartedness we are called on to develop for the sake of future humanity, can hardly fail to make more difficult the process of transition.

And in Spencer's own case it is not, in fact, the sympathetic interest that is most decisive. There is another motive that might, and with fewer logical complications, lead to man's coöperation with nature in the evolutionary process—an intellectual emotion directed toward the process itself. It plainly appears self-evident to Spencer that any reasonable person, when he is convinced that nature is working to a certain end, will be constrained by an intellectual sense of self-respect to make this his own end as well. Such an acceptance of the *de facto* laws of science as an ideal goal is perhaps on the whole the most characteristic feature of Spencer's ethical standpoint; in the light of it, at any rate, we need to approach the main practical content of his doctrine. The most fundamental duty of man is to further that process of evolution whose law it has been the privilege of science to uncover. And the essence of this law, in terms of human conduct, is located in the concept of Justice.

5. The nature of justice is a corollary of the evolutionary formula. If man is to become adapted to his surroundings, it is essential first of all that acts which are favorable to adaptation should have a real survival value for the one who performs them. This the principle of natural selection guarantees; and accordingly the survival of the fittest is the presupposition of ethical advance.[2] In this way, and only in this way, do instincts and sentiments favorable to survival become a part of man's inheritable nature. It follows on scientific authority that the consequences which flow from a man's character and conduct should be allowed their natural repercussions, and not be artificially averted;

[2] *Cf. Principles of Ethics,* II, 6.

for if this last takes place, one sort of act will have no better chance of surviving than another.

The fundamental demand of justice is, accordingly, that each man be left free to pursue such ends as his own nature and desires prompt, under conditions that leave him to reap the consequences, good or evil. It is true that under social life this right to freedom has had to suffer many qualifications. Especially in times of war it has seemed necessary that liberty of individual action should be very substantially restricted in order that the group itself may survive. As a consequence, customs and habits of subordination which contradict the primary principle of justice have had their necessary place in social development. But with the shift from a military to an industrial basis the necessity grows less acute, and the claim to freedom as the essential presupposition of justice comes more and more to be admitted. As the need diminishes for sacrificing the individual to preserve the state, the true principle that governs the limitation of human freedom comes to light within the state itself. This is the limitation founded on the requirements of freedom itself. Since it is not in this or that particular man that evolution is interested, but in every man in his capacity as a citizen of the community, the full principle of justice comes to this—that each man be left free to do as he pleases subject to the condition that he does not interfere with the similar freedom of other men.

The principle of *laissez faire,* originating in the economic field, has thus become the guiding principle of all ethics, in so far as ethics proposes to teach man to coöperate with nature in its great task of evolving a perfect humanity that shall presuppose the ability of each to find his highest pleasure in the common welfare, with none of those impediments that at the present day adulterate the good and limit its absolute authority. Such a principle Spencer uses

on the one hand to justify, as the foundation of the moral character, a sturdy spirit of independence and a freedom from subservience to every compulsion save that of science; on the other hand, and chiefly, it issues in an impassioned protest against that benevolent or socialistic conception of the state which was forsaking the salutary doctrine that the business of the community is solely protection or defense—of the nation against outside aggression, and of each individual within the state against the aggression of his neighbors—and was leading it to undertake all sorts of positive services for which it not only was not fitted, but through which it was doing its best to thwart the efforts of a beneficent nature to bring about a higher human type. The standpoint is one that deserves respectful consideration, especially at a time when freedom and the rights of man are having to undergo a renewed struggle against powerful social forces. But Spencer's particular method of grounding it starts so many queries, both ethical and scientific, that it is no matter of surprise if on the whole it has failed to stem the tide toward a more positive and constitutive notion of the state.

It rests, for one thing, on a scientific belief which, to speak conservatively, is still unsubstantiated in any form sufficient to serve Spencer's purpose—the doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characters. Apart from his assumption that habits and sentiments have only to be formed in individuals to assure their ultimate transmission to a new generation in the shape of instincts, his proof of the inevitability of an absolute ethics would be very greatly weakened. And there is a further difficulty, also, in terms of scientific theory. In whatever way favorable variations in conduct may have originated, the power of nature in the evolutionary process is exercised in the end only as these are preserved at the expense of less favorable traits through the action of natural selection. But then, where does this leave Spencer's thesis that the course of evolution is in the

direction of eliminating the struggle for existence alike within the group and between competing groups? The situation which this gives rise to Spencer meets in too desultory a way for the importance of the issue. In general it involves continuing to use that "struggle to make a living" which constitutes the outstanding feature of an industrial society, as if it were identical with the "struggle for life" that characterizes an earlier and more brutal age. But the defense of *laissez faire* gets its whole force from the assumption that the struggle for existence is one of life and death. Only if inferior individuals are killed off before they have the chance to leave descendants can they affect the new generation and so the human type; and this is what the relaxing of the struggle through the growth of social ties more and more tends to interfere with. The industrially unfit are no longer actually eliminated; on the contrary, it is a familiar complaint that as a class they tend to be more prolific than their superiors.

The objection holds even if we assume, following the argument, that the industrially well-to-do self-evidently stand higher in the ethical scale than those whose incomes are more precarious, so that to interfere with the existing distribution of material blessings is to interfere with the "established constitution of things." [3] But also such an assumption is itself disputable. It is not even perfectly safe to take it for granted in the narrow terms of industrial capacity; certainly in any society that has as yet existed there are many artificial handicaps that make success dependent on other things than sheer native ability. But in any case it is not unreasonable to entertain a doubt as to whether success in business can be taken as implying the possession of the socially most desirable qualities. Spencer is clearly influenced here by the romanticism that in his day was enveloping the career of business enterprise. The only reasoned basis apparent for his opinion is the presump-

[3] *Ibid.*, II, 475.

tion that, since industry involves coöperation, it will naturally be a source of the social sympathies. And this much *is* evidently true, that business would be impossible without the avoidance of certain vices which a military culture fosters. But on the other hand it has become by this time obvious that the competitive nature of modern business carries with it dangers to the cultivation of a genuinely social spirit almost as formidable as the more heroic vices of a warlike age. To a generation familiar with cutthroat competition, sweat shops, and all the dubious devices of the trader, Spencer's faith that a free hand for individual enterprise is a sure recipe for the growth of an altruistic justice plainly needs reconsideration.

6. The difficulties of combining *laissez faire* as a method with universal altruism as a goal have another illustration in the trouble Spencer is put to in his treatment of the positive virtue of benevolence. The whole point of his argument is that weakness, ignorance, and incapacity should be left to bear the penalty of their natural consequences, in order that such qualities may as quickly as possible be eliminated from the world. For this there is something to be said. A philanthropy that deals with symptoms rather than with causes has no solid footing; and it is often impossible to deal effectively with causes except by letting people suffer for their sins and blunders. But while we cannot afford out of pity for individuals to lose sight of the well-being of society—which includes the interests of future generations—complacency toward suffering has a limit. And if we are asked to acquiesce in the wholesale slaughter of the misfits of society, at the very least we shall have to recognize that a cultivation of the sympathies has been made more difficult.[4] In theory we may be permitted to anticipate a future state where, pain having largely disappeared, sympathy becomes predominatingly a pleasurable sympathy with the pleasures of our fellows, and so wholly

[4] *Cf. Principles of Psychology,* Vol. II, p. 611.

good and right, which a sympathy with suffering can never be. But there is no obvious path to this desirable end except through a keener feeling here and now for man's abundant sorrows; the unprotesting contemplation of great multitudes enduring without relief the fatal consequences of their imperfections, however fortified we might be by scientific reasoning, would inevitably have the effect of blunting every form of social sensibility. True, there is one way in which the difficulty would be greatly lessened—if while relieving suffering we were at the same time to prevent undesirable evolutionary consequences through some eugenic scheme that would keep the unfit from reproducing their kind. But the practical difficulties in the way of this are formidable, as Spencer clearly sees. At the least it is hardly conceivable they could be overcome without a violation of the principle of *laissez faire*. And the thought of a few men in high office undertaking a drastic regulation of the family life might well give pause even to those less convinced than Spencer was of the absoluteness of the law of individual freedom.

Where actually Spencer leaves the matter is in the form of an unstable compromise. The ruthlessness of cosmic law is to govern public action, while at the same time an opportunity for the cultivation of the sympathies is to be left open in the field of strictly private benevolence.[5] In other words, what Spencer tells us in effect is this, that the state is to do nothing to relieve the sufferings that come from human imperfections because the law of nature requires that imperfect individuals be got rid of in the interest of the race; but meanwhile this only in appearance is callous and hard-hearted, since the natural sympathies will find a better field for their exercise—and incidentally undo the good that the state has accomplished by its abstention—in the practice of private philanthropy. There is an evident confusion here. On the one hand Spencer, as usual, is

[5] *Principles of Ethics*, II, 274.

upholding private initiative against public effort, on the ground that the former is more efficient than the latter and accomplishes its purpose better. But the more successful he is in proving this, the more dangerous it becomes to his fundamental thesis, which is, precisely, that suffering, in the interest of society, ought *not* to be relieved, unless the question of merit is clearly not involved.

Meanwhile this limiting clause is for Spencer decidedly restricted, since if he had been ready to allow that lack of success in an industrial society may be in any considerable degree the result of artificial obstacles rather than a lack of natural gifts, there would be no apparent cosmic reason why society might not profitably, through concerted action, assist nature by removing the obstacles; and in that case the purely negative conception of social justice would have been compromised. The general outcome is that no practicable method appears of subjecting the desirable and necessary exercise and growth of the sympathetic feelings to the limits which the law of justice demands. That Spencer does not despair of human progress is explainable only by a resolute faith that, since science shows the good to be inevitable, nature can be trusted somehow to find a way out of the predicament in which she has placed herself.

7. That Spencer's attempt to lend to ethics the prestige of evolutionary science was a piece of speculative reasoning rather than a strict deduction from scientific law needs no better evidence than its failure to convince scientists themselves. One of the most damaging criticisms it met with comes, indeed, from Thomas Huxley—a source that will not be accused of anti-scientific bias. With no cosmic philosophy of his own to defend, Huxley is able to allow full sway to the natural logic of the facts. There is a sense in which he insists as vigorously as Spencer on the value of science for the guidance of human conduct. He has an almost fanatical feeling for the need of facing facts, and of putting in the place of a reverence for authority an open-minded

recognition of the laws of nature as they reveal themselves in terms of inevitable consequences for human weal or woe. But in this sense science concerns the *means* to right conduct rather than sets its end or goal; and Huxley's main thesis is that morality, instead of following nature, is a definitely human creation which breaks with the processes of natural selection that hitherto have been nature's method. He does not deny that this new attitude is also in a sense a natural product. Sympathy and social helpfulness have themselves been evolved, and in their evolution natural selection has played its part. But the outcome, nevertheless, is a sharp reversal of what up to that time had been nature's way, and not only permits, but forces us, to set human progress apart from "natural" progress as a new departure.

Nor is there any sound reason to believe that the need for a self-discipline under the control of a purely human conception of the good will ever disappear, or that Spencer's dream will come true of a human nature so attuned to the universe that simply by following his inclinations a moral agent will render both himself and everybody else completely happy. Morality must always be a small cultivated plot precariously holding its own in a vast and tangled wilderness ever on the alert to win back its undisputed sway. In particular, the population peril always hangs over the head of civilized society; once allow the race to outrun its means of subsistence, and a return to the desperate struggle for existence cannot be averted. But if man will hold steadfastly before him this human goal of the social good, and learn to put restraint upon his instincts, including the dangerous reproductive instinct, then he has before him the reasonable prospect, not indeed of a utopia, but at least of a gradual bettering of his lot, in the direction of an ideal of personal decency, of social coöperation and kindliness, and of a high and disinterested love of truth intent on seeing things exactly as they are.

8. A still more explicit reaction against the central tenet of Spencer's teaching is to be found widely prevalent at the close of the nineteenth century in that ambitious new attempt to subject human life and society to a scientific treatment which issues in a glorification, if not an apotheosis, of "humanity" as the true ethical ideal. In part this takes the form of an insistence—frequently rather pedantic—on the "social" nature of man as the solution of all problems—a tendency which marks the reaction, due to a better anthropological understanding of the character of early society, against every form of individualism as no longer scientifically respectable; in part, also, it appears as an emotional enthusiasm which has its root less in scientific understanding than in a revolt against supernatural religion by the religious temperament. Both these motives are present in the greatest of the sociologists, Auguste Comte; and along with them there goes a wide learning, a fertile originality, and an unbounded intellectual self-assurance, which are still impressive. Comte's ethical conclusions are, however, too unsystematic to call for much remark. Just as Helvetius tells us that all our motives are selfish and egoistic, with little attempt at proof beyond pointing to the obvious fact that selfish motives are constantly in evidence in the conduct of the best of men, so Comte, with rather less justification from the surface facts, finds sympathy the one human motive underlying all deserving action, and sets out to remold society in a way to give it its due preëminence at the expense of every form of self-seeking interest. In England, perhaps the most striking representative of the same social idealism is W. K. Clifford, whose interpretation of the moral conscience as the tribal mind at work within the individual, and of man's true good as the service of a glorified humanity, is marked by a rhapsodical enthusiasm closer to poetry than to science.

This relatively uncritical character of the social or sociological concept for a time served to shift the emphasis of

a popularized scientific ethics away almost completely from the individualism which had preceded it. The more the dominant claims of society are urged, the more, it is true, we are in a way lending weight to the Utilitarian notion of the general good. But on the other hand the new emphasis on the social organism, and the strong disposition, encouraged by the irresistible attraction of abstract terms for the philosophic mind, to ascribe to this a value of its own distinct from the individual happiness of its component parts, threw its influence on the side of the same social goal and method that the competing philosophy of Idealism has been seen to foster, and tended to issue in the conception of a paternal state aware, through the agency of its best minds, of the scientific content of the social good, and prepared to guide its citizens benevolently but firmly in the path of virtue. This despotism of the scientific mind has its classical representative again in Comte, where it takes a form that is almost a *reductio ad absurdum*.

9. The most sober and most closely reasoned statement of the "organic" concept from the standpoint of scientific evolutionism will perhaps be found in Leslie Stephen. Stephen accepts, with Spencer, the fundamental hedonism of the Utilitarians; the only occasion of conscious or intentional action is agreeable or disagreeable feeling, though such feeling is to be identified not with the anticipation of a future pleasure, but with the feeling tone that characterizes the actual present state of consciousness. Also, Stephen agrees with Spencer that we cannot take such feelings, though they alone influence the individual directly, as the standard of moral action, in so far as this represents the individual's genuine welfare. While there is a rough approximation between what is good for a man and what is pleasant to him, nothing like an identity exists; and if one makes present feeling his guide it will often mean acting to his own hurt. Stephen's quest is, consequently, for a law of moral conduct that shall supply an objective standard,

while at the same time not overlooking the fact that each man wants primarily his own welfare, and that an appeal in terms of private feeling is the only spur to action.

This criterion he finds in the notion of social health, or social vitality. The sense in which health may be supposed to furnish a law where happiness fails to do so is illustrated by the analogy of physical health. A man may care for his health only as an occasion of pleasant feeling; nevertheless he is more likely to get what he wants by aiming directly at those general conditions of bodily enjoyment which the word health represents than by thinking of pleasure directly, since the piecemeal and desultory character of pleasant feeling prevents it from being the source of general rules, and so of rational guidance. In the same way we find that man is dependent for his private welfare on the fact that he is one of a number of related individuals forming a social group or whole, and that his chances for happiness are constantly affected by these objective social conditions; he can only live his own life successfully in so far as he belongs to a healthy, vigorous society or state. These most general and necessary conditions through which each individual prospers or suffers by reason of his dependence on his neighbors Stephen calls "social tissue"; and it is here he finds the possibility of stating general rules of conduct independent of the particular feelings aroused at the moment in the private man.

This should not be taken to mean that, at the start, moral habits are the outcome of a conscious recognition of their useful consequences. Stephen is inclined to regard a conscious utilitarianism as the result rather than the source of ethical development, and to explain the implicit universalism of moral rules as a half unconscious extension of the more primitive sentiments evolved in connection with the institution of the family. But the basis for this evolution is, nevertheless, the stability of the social group rather than the happiness of the individual directly; and accordingly it

is the social welfare that later comes to consciousness in the scientific understanding as the source of general moral rules. And herein lies the advantage of the formula as compared with that of the Utilitarians. An appeal to pleasant feeling must take for granted a given fixed type of man, since it is only in terms of a specific constitution that we can tell what things will actually give pleasure. And while it therefore will provide for a morality of the moment, it cannot give a law of change, which it is the main business of an evolutionary theory of morals to supply. Since man himself is evolving, it is impossible to found any common rule on a happiness the standard of which changes as the organism changes. We can only formulate a law of change if we recognize that a given type is itself dependent on more permanent conditions; and these conditions are to be found in the notion of social vitality.[6]

Meanwhile, although the law of morality is formulated in terms of the social organism and its welfare, it continues to be true that this does not represent the actual motive commonly present in the minds of individuals when they act. The explanation of any apparent discrepancy here is found in the theory of the moral sentiments. The sentiment of chief importance is the one to which we give the name of conscience, and which consists of the feeling or group of feelings that makes social conformity pleasant and a want of conformity painful. The evolutionary basis of conscience is found in the fact that it is in practice much more feasible to lay down a general rule in terms of a good disposition than it is in terms of the act to which a disposition points. A law against murder, for example, is bound to have to take account of a variety of exceptional cases which it is impossible, either materially or formally, to provide for in any simple and intelligible statement of the law; it is easier and more effective to condemn the spirit of murder present in the heart.

[6] *Science of Ethics*, 148, 201, 345-6.

The development of the moral judgment tends, in consequence, to shift from conduct to character, from "do this," to "be this"; and, as elsewhere, there grows up a corresponding sentiment in connection with the new emphasis. And since the existence of such a sentiment is the surest guaranty of conduct in the interest of the whole—surer even than a calculation of consequences that must always be subject to the limitations of man's intellect and his possibilities of disinterested judgment—it is the motive whose presence comes to be recognized as being necessary for the highest degree of moralization. The truly moral man is one who acts, not for the sake of extraneous goods, but because of his respect for the moral law itself, and for the social welfare which, as conscience grows enlightened, he comes to see is the underlying motive of the law. By such a theory the social instincts are given the authority which is their due, without elevating them into transcendental intuitions.[7]

But what, it might still be asked, is the rational guaranty behind such a sentiment when we press the matter to the final issue? While we can always say that, in the average case and on the whole, the individual himself is better off by reason of that which benefits society, to show any complete identity between private happiness and the general welfare is impossible; and the question still remains, therefore, why a man should, when the coincidence fails, voluntarily prefer to sacrifice himself to the good of the whole, and uphold the moral law at the expense of his own interest. To this Stephen answers that there is no method of persuading anyone if he does not himself feel that way about it. Any successful argument must presuppose in him the existence of the moral sentiment which carries approval of the socially expedient act even when it means a personal loss, and which, as approval, constitutes accordingly a motive. If he is without this sentiment of conscience, or if it is too weak in him to stand out against private incite-

[7] *Ibid.*, 265.

ments, he is bound to find the thought of self-sacrifice irrational; and the only thing left for society is to protect itself against him by the infliction of external and non-moral penalties. But fortunately the feeling is there in most men, ingrained in their natures by the evolutionary process. And it can be encouraged and strengthened by education so as to become a fairly reliable motive; though of course it often fails us, and probably will continue at times to fail us to the end.[8]

On the whole, this is perhaps as good an answer as can be found. If people do not already have in them the germs at least of the feeling that certain things are fair and decent, even when they seem to go against self-interest, it is difficult to see any way of making them really moral, or of counteracting, except by force, the appeal of reasons based on self-advantage; while if they do possess such sentiments, these up to a point will themselves be a sufficient reason why they should do the fair and decent thing. But also in granting this the emphasis has already shifted. For what now after all seems to be happening is that we are taking "sentiment" as our final standard. Instead of justifying certain forms of human nature by the objective test of evolutionary science, we are using the facts of human nature as we find it to throw whatever light there can be thrown upon the final validity of the evolutionary process itself. The claims of society in the end maintain themselves, not because they have played a factual part in bringing about the social sentiment, but because the sentiment actually exists and constrains our judgment. The scientific recognition of this causal rôle may buttress the sentiment; though it might conceivably have a directly opposite effect, and discredit the feeling to our minds through the perception of its naturalistic origin. But in either case, whether we still stand by it or try to throw it off, not the dead past of evolution is the decisive influence,

[8] *Ibid.*, 434, 441.

but our present nature with the feeling playing an active rôle. All that an appeal to evolution possibly can tell us has to do with the conditions that enable life to be preserved; and unless, accordingly, a thing needs only to exist in order to have value, which is absurd, we must look further for a criterion of the good.

And once this is allowed, it also follows that the attempt to confine morality to the field of social health loses its compelling force. It is convenient for an ideal of scientific deduction in ethics to have some solid fact like social organization to resort to. But it is theory, rather than the facts, that would limit moral value wholly to the social. The more highly the conscience is developed, the more it feels constrained by other and more immediate forms of approval and condemnation, which are felt to retain their intrinsic hold on the self-respect of the individual even in a lonely world.

10. Among the numerous writers who have in one form or another exploited the conception of an ethics based on science, only one other name will here be noticed—that of the Frenchman Jean-Marie Guyau. The fundamental concept of Guyau's "morality without obligation or sanction" is comparable, formally, with the self-preservation of Hobbes or the self-assertion of Spinoza; but it is interpreted in a broader sense than either. It gets expression in the formula that the moral end is "life," in its fullest and richest sense.

In this notion of morality conceived in terms of the most intense and most varied range of human function, Guyau finds his substitute for the repressive agency of obligation or moral duty. Not negative sanctions, but the force of an overflowing vitality, is what cheapens lesser forms of attainment; it leads man to rise spontaneously above the call of isolated pleasures, and to find his satisfaction in a vigorous and abounding activity, and in the objective occasions which furnish to activity an outlet. In this way he

finds it possible to hold to, and to emphasize, the psychological primacy of the individual, without having to subordinate it logically when he turns to sociology, or to adopt the more or less artificial ties for connecting man and society to which a scientific ethics had been accustomed to resort. This he does through a recognition of the experimental fact that social relationships, instead of being restrictive, offer innumerable new channels into which the stream of life may flow, and so justify themselves directly in terms of its greater breadth and volume. Not merely, or chiefly, on account of the advantage it affords in the way of protection or of securing added pleasures, but immediately as an accession to that sense of self-expansion which is the supreme source of value, does society enter into the content of a good which must be the individual's good if it is to deserve the name at all. The man who is truly alive will be too full of life to live only for himself; "to live is to spend as well as to gain." Herein lies the true reconciliation of egoism and altruism, not in a kind of "altruistic debauchery" which aims to live *only* for others, but in active and productive *work,* since to produce is to be useful alike to myself and to the world.[9]

But also—and it is a special merit to have made this plain—in taking abundance of life as the ethical ideal, the pretense to scientific rigor has to be relaxed. In terms of preservation it may be possible to lay down laws definite enough to deserve the name of science, which the organism must follow under penalty of being eliminated—along ultimately with the race itself—by the hostile forces of nature. But the moment we shift to the joys of an intense and vigorous activity we are no longer able to confine this to particular channels that can be made a subject of universal legislation. One thing by itself would negative this possibility—the presence in experience of the spirit of curiosity

[9] *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction,* pp. 96, 99, 113*sq.*, 247.

and adventure which is the antithesis of a cautious rationalism, and which explains that curious but obviously existent tendency of human nature to run the risk of loss, even total loss, for the sake of problematic ends. And in particular in the realm of spiritual adventure, in art and society and religion, we find something inconsistent with the ideal of science that aims to subject life to hard-and-fast laws whose outcome is predictable and authoritative. Accordingly Guyau recognizes, as a supplement to any possible scientific ethics, a more significant realm where the human spirit seeks to escape from the control of rules and certainties and safeties, and to try its own wings, guided only by the felt need to give to life the richest possible expression.[10] More, possibly, than any other reputable theorist—and this is the more striking in view of his scientific prepossessions—he represents a recognition of the demand for an unlimited and uncharted sphere of free activity as a factor in the notion of the good—a sphere where we consult not reasoned formulas, but our own deepest instincts, our most vivid sympathies, our most normal and most human aversions.[11]

[10] *Ibid.*, Bk. II.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

POSTSCRIPT

Reflection on the history of ethical speculation is not unlikely to leave in a divided frame of mind such readers as are not already committed to some special philosophic creed. While nothing like the same logical acumen has been devoted to ethics that has gone into other branches of philosophy, much acute and vigorous thinking has of course been expended in trying to understand the moral life; but it is not perhaps so clear that the results are commensurate with the effort. In particular it is deserving of notice how very infrequently a consideration of the facts of conduct seems to have led the philosopher to suspect that morals may need any important new light or new development. One of the conspicuous things about the history of ethical theory is the consistency with which it issues in an enforcement and amplifying of the more dignified and respectable moral precepts of the ethicist's own age and condition of society. Conservatism is so ingrained in moral philosophy that it is a pretty safe prophecy that whenever the thinker's efforts lead him away from the beaten path his name will come down to us a little tarnished, as that of a presumably bad man as well as poor philosopher.

The suspicion which the typical moralist shows toward moral innovations is reflected on the side of theory in one outstanding feature that marks the history of ethics in the large. This is the dominating part that "reason" plays. Excellent grounds for such an emphasis can be propounded. In the end ethics holds its interest for man because he is concerned with his own destiny and welfare; its final business is not with scientific explanation, but with acceptable ideals of conduct. Science may throw all sorts of light on

the proper business of morals, but it cannot be made to constitute the whole of it without depriving moral speculation of its power to guide and interpret life; and to a being who has to live as well as to think this has very little chance of finding general favor. Even the scientist almost invariably assumes that, when he has pointed out that a certain kind of conduct is in line with a "law of nature," he has a just grievance if men do not thereupon adopt it; which means that he too is setting up a standard of what ought to be, though usually without seeing very clearly that he is thus abandoning the strictly scientific point of view. Accordingly the ethicist finds himself naturally devoting his chief attention not to those aspects that can be presupposed in all conduct alike, and that equally are involved in its aberrations, but to the particular considerations that may be expected to keep the moral agent in the straight and narrow way—the rational considerations that can be opposed to inclination, and passion, and the various naturalistic ingredients of action.

If it happens to be true, however, that these other parts of human nature are not there simply to be mastered, but that they are of positive significance for the ethical experience, such an insistence upon reason is likely to influence unduly the perspective of the moralist. The result has been the rather conspicuous absence in ethical philosophy of any whole-hearted admission of the need for experimental initiative in conduct. In the abstract the theorist may grant that morality still has things to learn from experience, and that the present rules of the game may need to be revised; but he would have the process carried on so cautiously and slowly that his moral support remains almost always on the side that objects to change. In other fields new discoveries always involve a spirit of adventurousness which the moralist hesitates to admit into the domain of experiments in living. And if ethics is to have anything new to learn in the future, it presumably will not be uncon-

nected with a clearer recognition that the keeping within such bounds as all decorous persons can approve is not the final word in morals. This last at any rate is not the primary emphasis we should expect in people who are deeply stirred and interested by the vision of some positive form of goodness. Men who see something ahead which they very badly want often, no doubt, incline a little to unscrupulousness. Vocations, like that of the artist, in which emotional enthusiasms play a leading part are not unlikely to generate a degree of moral latitudinarianism; and periods marked by a lively realization of the value of some human end—for example, times of war—are always difficult to live through without risk to the stability of serviceable rules. The moral philosopher may play a useful rôle in stepping in to check this tendency to lawlessness. But in taking on the rôle he cannot safely overlook the fact that for satisfactory living motive power is at least as essential as control, and growth of equal importance with discipline and order.

The same tendency is evident in the prevalent disposition of moral theory to follow custom in standardizing ways of living so as to force much the same program on everyone alike, although it is an obvious truth that men differ in what affords them satisfaction. Here likewise a more or less convincing reason is at hand. The existence of widely varying notions in detail of wherein lies the good of life is not inconsistent with the possibility of pointing out general principles that govern all of them; and the special business of the theorist, it may be said, is with these more universal factors. But such a preoccupation has usually led him not only to omit from his own task the special determination of the individual content of the good—which, indeed, he could never hope to do—but to forget, or to deny, that there *is* an individual content, and to talk as if a single end could be laid down for everyone. This is especially unfortunate because the outlines of *the* good life will naturally be drafted by the philosopher in terms of his own sympathies and pref-

erences; and the ideal of the thinker is almost invariably suffused with qualities that spoil it for the average man.

On the side of practice, the form that perhaps most adequately embodies the criticism which the history of speculative ethics as a whole suggests is in terms of the conflict, fundamental in man's intellectual progress, between authority and freedom. In logic, the prevailing note of reason is authority, which it has always been found very difficult to separate from its natural connection with the constituted authorities; and there is no antidote that does not involve the active cultivation of a habit of moral independence and self-confidence, even though this may run the risk at times of opposing good along with bad. The realization of such a demand, and a recognition, alike by sympathizer and opponent, of its logical consequences for practice, was probably never so self-conscious and explicit as at the present moment; and in the moral ferment which has been the natural outcome, and which is plainly on the increase, lies the most compelling reason why ethics needs to reconsider its usual attitude toward experiment and novelty. So long as even the critic and rebel are themselves secretly impressed by the authority of codes which all their neighbors take for granted, these codes, though habitually violated in practice, are never seriously threatened. But when dissent becomes general enough to arouse uneasiness in the minds of those who want the old order to continue, and so this order itself is put on the defensive, the familiar methods of authority no longer work. A resort to force, which may have no very dangerous repercussions so long as the self-evident righteousness of those who exercise it can be assumed, now only makes the situation worse; and conscious argument and exhortation to prop up waning loyalties is singularly lacking in the impressiveness that supports a confident and unreasoning faith.

The issue, especially in recent times, has formulated itself in terms of one concept in particular. Modern ethical

theory is everywhere found falling back on the notion of "society" to solve its problems; the traditionalist, the idealist, the "scientific" ethicist, all in some general sense agree that in the social welfare the standard of morality is to be discovered. The agreement plainly ought to count for something; nevertheless it raises questions. Its tendency has been to continue into modern times that minimizing of the individual man and his experimental efforts which is the heritage from the classical Greek tradition. Thus a cosmic idealism has, as we have seen, its practical outcome nearly always in a reverence for historic institutions and the State such as leaves little significance to personal preferences and judgments, and its logic leads most naturally to the discouragement of any desire for change. For a "scientific" ethics it is true, no doubt, that change or evolution holds a commanding place; but it is change that still runs the risk of compromising the individual and his claims. Evolution is in the interest of the race rather than of the man as such; and for the more earnest evolutionist this subordination of the individual to the species is a literal and ruthless one. It is no matter of surprise, accordingly, that we should now be witnessing in many quarters a certain impatience with talk about "society," and a disposition to repudiate all moralistic fetters for the sake of free individual self-expression.

It is not likely in the least that the claims of society will ever be permanently depressed; but the existing situation does plainly constitute an urgent call for reinterpreting their nature. We need to restate the social welfare in a way to divest it of its character of abstractness and remoteness, and of its exclusive connection with security and smugness, so that it may be seen to be what it manifestly is—the welfare of a great number and variety of men who have numerous interests in common, but for each of whom, nevertheless, the good takes on a personal complexion which cannot be deduced rationally from general principles, but can be

discovered only in the process of living by each man for himself. On a more adequate critical understanding of the social welfare in terms of personal liberty and personal realization most of the compelling political and social problems now are waiting; and to such an understanding philosophy presumably will not be without its contribution.

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